



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

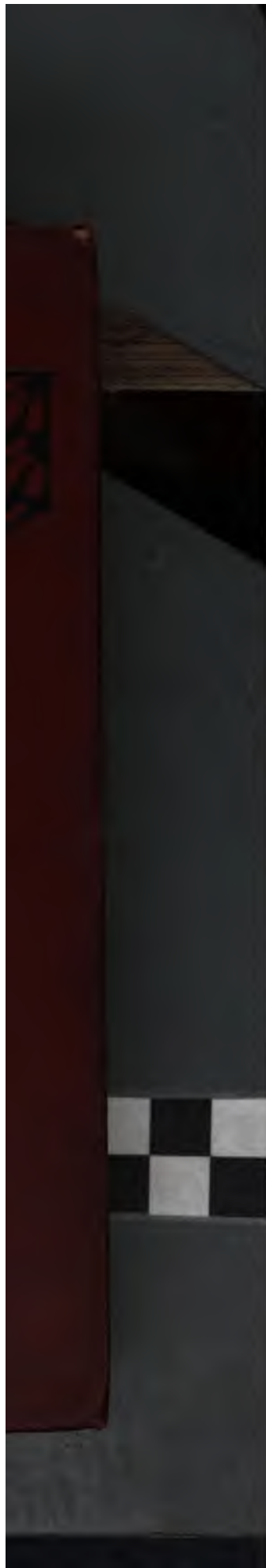
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





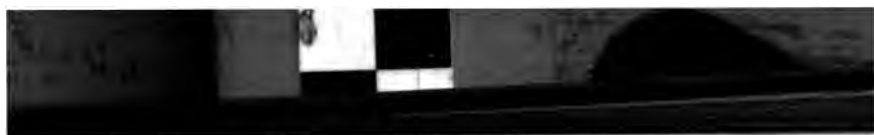
[illegible]





THE END





THE MAINLAND

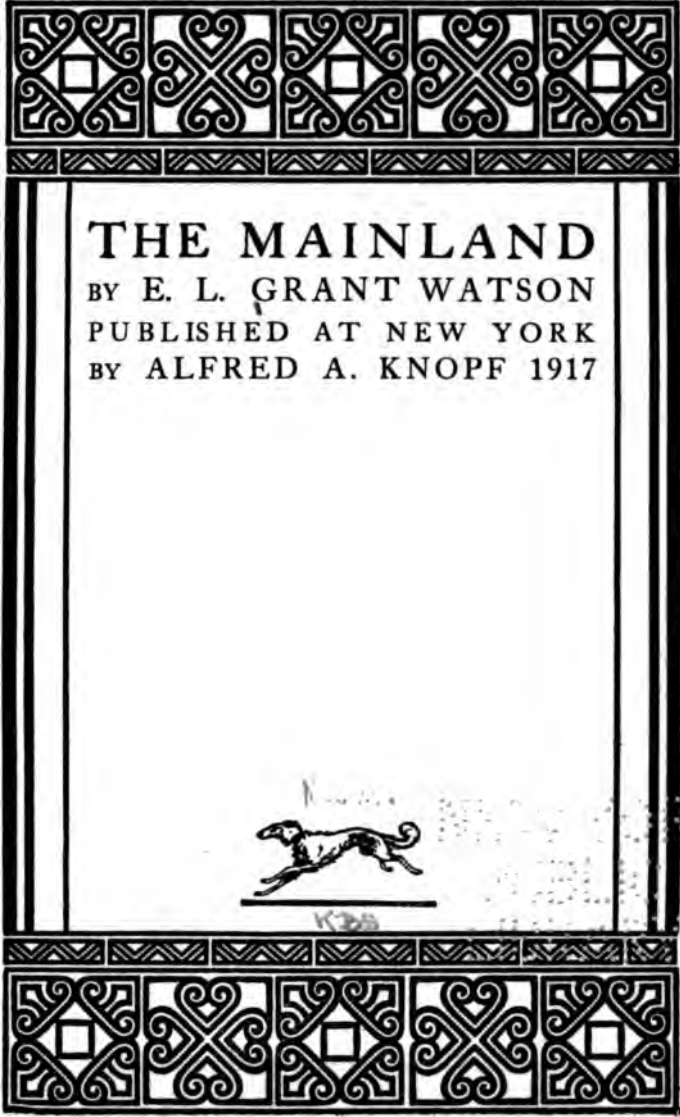




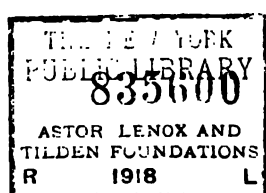
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. L. Grant Watson was trained as a zoologist at Trinity College, Cambridge, and obtained a Class 1 Honors in Natural Science Tripos in 1909. He then went to Northwest Australia as Zoologist to an Ethnological Expedition and was away for fifteen months, eight of which he spent alone with two other white men, natives of the far northwest. He returned to England by Sydney, Fiji - where he stayed again among the natives - and the Pacific. After his return he decided to abandon science and took to writing. Before long he had finished **WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED**, and this, his first novel, was accepted by the first publisher he sent it to. It was followed shortly by **THE MAINLAND**.

In writing Mr. Watson considers that he has found his true vocation, and if he survives this war (he is now engaged in Army work) he will give all his time to it, though at present it is unfortunately quite at a standstill.



COPYRIGHT, 1917, BY
ALFRED A. KNOPF



ALFRED A. KNOPF
NEW YORK
1917

A faint, dotted stamp or watermark, likely a blind-stamped publisher's mark, located in the lower-left quadrant of the page. It contains the name "ALFRED A. KNOPF" and the location "NEW YORK" followed by the year "1917".

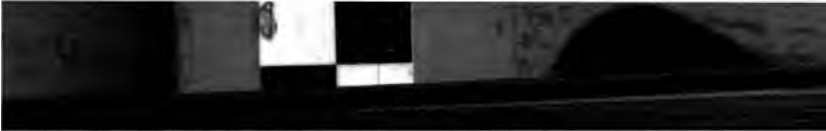
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



To
My Steppather
J. C. POWELL

*Over the great windy waters and over the clear-crested summits,
Unto the sea and the sky, and unto the perfecter earth,
Come, little bark — to a land wherein gods of the old time wandered,
Where every breath even now changes to ether divine.
Come, let us go; though withal a voice whisper—"The world that we
live in,
Whithersoever we turn, still is the same narrow crib;
'Tis but to prove limitation, and measure a cord, that we travel;
Let who would scape and be free go to his chamber and think;
'Tis but to change idle fancies for memories wilfully falser;
'Tis but to go and have been." Come, little bark, let us go.*

A. H. CLOUGH.



CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I	THE ISLAND	9
II	THE PORT OF KAIMERA	45
III	THE SEABOARD	62
IV	THE WIDE HORIZON	107
V	THE MIRAGE	147
VI	THE TOWN	188
VII	THE DESERT	213
VIII	THE BEATEN TRACK	259
IX	EPILOGUE	303





THE MAINLAND

CHAPTER I THE ISLAND

I

ON the crest of a sand-dune under the shadow of a clump of stunted and wind-bent acacia bushes the boy, John Sherwin, sat at his ease and looked out over the Indian Ocean. The afternoon was calm with an occasional gust of wind to ruffle the surface of the sea, adding here and there a touch of green or purple to the deep blue of its smooth expanse.

John Sherwin, sixteen years old, was a well-formed, strong boy. He wore no clothes whatever, and his skin was tanned dark brown by constant exposure to the sun. His hair was long and matted and reached to his shoulders. It was red in colour, but so dark as to be in no way "sandy," rather the tint of dark mahogany with the sun on it. His neck was full and strong, well-proportioned to support the head with its mass of hair. As he moved indolently the muscles of his arms and neck slipped like live and alert animals under the smooth skin. His hips were narrow, his legs hard and well-tapered with no spare flesh on them, and his boy's belly was lean as a hound's. On his chin were a few adolescent hairs. His

features were regular and tranquil, and between his lips his teeth shone very white.

During the morning he had been out with the dinghy fishing for snapper. He had caught ten: more than he needed — but then catching them was such fun. They now lay beside him strung together by a cord through their gills. They formed an iridescent pile of scarlet and silver. John scraped one of them affectionately with his thumb-nail and marvelled at the blending of orange, scarlet, rose and silver on its scales. Everything that he had ever seen in the sea was brilliantly coloured or had something brilliant about it, from small shells on the sand to the great tiger-sharks, which at evening came close in shore after the shoals of gar-fish. The corals were always brightly coloured, so too were the swimming sea-worms, the crabs, the sea-slugs and the fish, and even the little sand-coloured flat-fish had eyes more brilliant than any other living creature. He was glad that there was so much colour in the sea, and loved it for having so many bright things hidden.

The fifteen years of John Sherwin's life had been lived on Kanna Island with his father and mother and the black boy Coffee. He had been for the most part very happy. He was happy with his parents, and most happy in the long hours of solitude spent in roaming over the island. He knew the island and all the beasts that lived there; and the edges of the sea he had also explored very thoroughly and knew a great many of the sea creatures. He could shoot well with his father's gun, and could hit wallabies, or sea-eagles, or oyster-catchers when they were needed for food. He could fish as cleverly as a native, and could spear fish as easily as he could hook

them. He lived out of doors all day and every day, and often slept out with a single blanket for covering.

This life to a child of civilization might have seemed monotonous, but John had never known what it was to be bored. For him there was always interest to be found and sometimes adventure. How could he possibly be bored by lying on the sand-dunes watching the various insects that burrowed in, or flitted about it? If he were tired of that he could go and play in the sea, or swim far out, and imagine he was leaving the world altogether; then he could come in and run along the sands to where the dead coral reef touched the beach; there he could test his skill to the uttermost by trying to catch the ever-wary cray-fish that lurked in the deep hollows of the coral pools. Without knowing it, he loved life with a passion that gave joy and zest to every moment.

As he now gazed lazily out to sea, he caught sight of something unusual about fifty yards from the shore. He stood up to get a better view. Yes, there were three large black objects making slowly in towards the land. As they moved near the surface of the water they looked like some huge kind of fish, but they were larger than any fish that he had ever seen. For a few seconds he could not think what they were, then he saw that they were three monster rays, or stingarees. He had seen plenty of small ones, but these looked to be eight feet or more across. As they came closer in, he could see more distinctly. The two smaller fish appeared to be driving the larger one towards the land. As they came into the shallow water, they rose nearer to the surface, and their fins sticking out sometimes beat the air. The boy watched, tense with excitement; then he turned and

"Him big fellow, plenty full of eggs," grunted Coffee as he tugged at one of the pectoral fins, and finally turned the fish on its back.

John was very excited at this new and enormous capture, as he had only seen small stingarees before, and he was full of admiration for Coffee's familiar way of dealing with the creature. He probed tentatively at the crescent-shaped mouth with the butt end of one of the harpoons, and felt very much interested in the rows of large flat teeth that snapped savagely on one another. Then recollecting the broken spine, he ran off to fetch it.

The spine was about seven inches long and made of very hard white bone, barbed in every direction and covered all over with transparent mucilage. This mucilage, he knew, was what was so poisonous. By rubbing it in wet sand he got rid of all the poison, and very soon the spine shone like white ivory. This was indeed a trophy for a boy to be proud of, and one much prized by all sea fishermen, both black and white.

When he returned to Coffee, he found him engaged in cutting up the still remonstrating stingaree. He set to and helped, delighted at what appeared to be such beautiful flakes of white flesh. With a boy's curiosity he made a very thorough dissection of the stingaree, and when at length he was satisfied as to its structure and resources, he selected some of the better pieces of flesh, fastened them to his string of snapper, and then started to trudge home. Coffee remained, intent on securing the best of what was left.

The house where John Sherwin lived with his parents lay in a hollow between two sand-dunes and was hidden from all approaches except the sea. One of these dunes,

higher than any neighbouring point, offered a good view of the island. It was his father's habit frequently to climb this sand-dune, and to stand looking out to sea and down upon the long narrow length of the island. As John now approached he saw that his father and mother were both there. That they had already seen him he did not doubt. He felt annoyed a little because he knew that his mother would scold him for having discarded his clothes. About half a mile from the sand-dune he put down his string of fish and went to a thick clump of acacia bushes. From under these bushes he produced a pair of old cotton breeches and a shirt. These, when he had slipped into them, altered his appearance considerably; and he was no longer the beautiful and prehistoric youth of the island, but looked rather like a disreputable but handsome young pirate. Picking up his fish and slinging them over his shoulder, he climbed towards the dune where his parents were standing.

II

John Sherwin senior was fifty years old, strongly built and hardened by an exposed life. He looked younger than he was. There was little sign of grey in his thick red hair and beard. His face and bare arms were darkly tanned and covered with freckles. There was confidence in his look and a strength which only comes from a successful conflict with primitive material. His blue eyes were rather deep set and very bright; in them was tranquillity and happiness. His wife Alice, though five years younger, was more aged. Her black hair was streaked with grey and her face was heavily lined, but in

her expression there was also a great contentment. As is usually the case with women living in primitive conditions, she was wearing herself out in the service of the man whom she loved, and was happy in the sacrifice.

This man and woman, who lived so solitary a life on Kanna Island, had found happiness. They had attained an easy harmony with the surroundings of sea and cliff. The wind, blowing over the swept sand-dunes, contained the significance of their isolated life. Neither of them had any wish to return to the towns that for so long they had left. In each other they found reliance and security born of the tried companionship of years.

Sherwin's simple and frank nature found satisfaction in the island life. His small sheep farm gave him employment, and was an adequate means of livelihood. It was the one link which connected him with the mainland, and he was glad of the visits of the cutter when it came to bring stores or to take away his fat lambs. This exchange of goods enabled him to live. He had no need of money, and for the last few years had altogether ceased to use it. With Pomfrey, the captain of the cutter, he made rough bargains of exchange, and they both were satisfied.

Alice his wife had also found contentment, a thing rare with women of her type. At first the wide sweeps of the sea and sky had filled her with a sense of loneliness and fear, but later, when her son was born, she began to feel, through her husband's senses, the joy of the deep solitude and the waxing confidence of their union.

From the crest of the dune, where they now stood hand in hand, they watched the boy climbing toward

them under his heavy load of fish. In the woman's expression there was a look of almost passionate admiration for his youth, and Sherwin's eyes betrayed the pride which he felt in his son. They neither of them spoke, but watched silently as he panted up the hill. John gave no salutation as he approached, but flung down the fish in front of his father and then slowly turned them over with his foot so as to expose the ribbed white steaks of stingaree flesh. "Do you know what that is?" he asked.

Sherwin bent and picked up a piece; then said questioningly, "A big stingaree?"

"Yes," said John, full of pride, "and look"—he held out the spine.

"My word, that must have been a big one," said his father gravely, examining the spine. "How did you get it?"

John told the story. Then eagerly: "It's good to eat I suppose?"

"I prefer snapper," laughed his father. "No, even little ones are tough, and this one is just like rubber; feel it. You must have struck hard to get your harpoon in—I daresay Coffee could eat it, but it's coarse, common stuff."

"Anyway I'm going to try it," said John. "Mother, will you cook some for me?"

Sherwin laughed again. "Do you remember the blue bob-tail that you made your mother cook for you? I expect it will be something like that."

"Mother, will you cook some for me?" insisted the boy.

"Oh yes, I'll cook some."

"What have you done with the skin?" asked Sherwin.

"Coffee's got that. Why?"

"I was thinking it might come in useful. Stingaree skin is very tough. I believe there's a big trade done in some parts. They make a kind of leather that fetches a high price. I'll come and have a look at it — perhaps we can dry it in the sun. Alice, you can take one or two of the fish with you. We'll bring the rest when we come."

Down on the beach they found Coffee still occupied with the stingaree. Sherwin was pleased with the look of the skin, and decided that it was worth drying. By the time they started to walk towards the hut it was twilight, and when they came to the flat open ground in which it stood, Coffee hung back and finally halted.

"What's the matter, Coffee?" asked Sherwin.

"Plenty devil-devils this way. I not come — night time devil-devil."

John expected that his father would come out with some fierce oath that would send the recalcitrant Coffee speeding ahead, but to his surprise he noticed that the two men stood eyeing each other — Coffee resolute, and his father doubtful, suddenly turned sulky. He heard his father mutter something in his beard as he took the harpoons; Coffee then turned, and without a word ran towards the beach. The boy wanted to laugh but his father's manner restrained him; he only mentioned how Coffee had refused to fetch the harpoon from the hut, and asked what he meant by the talk of devil-devil. Sherwin, however, gave no answer, and John knew his father's temper too well to repeat the question. At last Sherwin very slowly put the harpoons away and st



THE ISLAND

19

to pick up some of the tackle that had fallen; then in a lowering mood he walked back in silence to the house.

Sherwin's quick temper was seldom prolonged into sulkiness, and his dark mood soon passed. At the evening meal he joked about John's stingaree, and the boy was eager with questions about the trade in skins. All that he heard excited him; with a boy's easily kindled enthusiasm he planned to make a collection of skins which some day he could trade with on the mainland. What exactly this would mean he did not know, but obviously the first thing was to get the skins, and that was enough for the present; the rest was a splendid and nebulous dream. He had heard a little about the mainland from Pomfrey and the two sailors who sometimes landed from the cutter. They had told stories of the North sea-board and of pearling, stories of Kaimera, the nearest port, and of horse-racing and prize-fights. For long past he had wondered idly about these things, but lately they had become more important: not that he did not love the life on the island, but he was beginning to be a little conscious of something else, something that was growing in strength and which now wove itself delightfully among his dreams of stingaree hunting. He urged his father to tell him all he knew about the trade, leading him on to talk of the pearling on the north coast. Sherwin, who usually only spoke of the life on the island, warmed to the new theme. John sat in silence, taking in the new picture of the outside world beyond the sea and the sand-dunes of Kanna Island.

"Did you ever go pearling?" asked the boy.

"No, but I might have done so at one time. There was an inlet not fifty miles from here—they called it Useless Inlet—out of which they took twenty thousand pounds' worth of shell."

"Is that a great deal?"

"It's enough to scrape up with a couple of old luggers and a few blacks."

"Is there more to be had?"

"Not round here, they've taken it all, but up beyond Maund's landing they say there are black pearls and big shells worth a lot of money."

After a pause John asked, "What do people want all the money for?"

"To buy things with," then with a little snort of contempt, "and to make themselves damned miserable." He looked across at Alice who smiled confidently at him. He went on, pleased at her encouragement. "It's not many boys of your age who have never wanted money. We have here everything that we want, and nothing to fret about. Now is there anything that you want that you haven't got?"

The boy thought a moment. "I would like a new rifle—one like Pomfrey's."

"You shall have one," said Sherwin, and thumped the table with his fist. "Anything else?"

"Father, when will you take me to the mainland?"

The question was unexpected, and in a moment Sherwin's anger flared out. "What the hell do you want to go to the mainland for? You say you've got all you want here. There are a damned lot of rotten things on the mainland, my son, and you're a fool to go seeking them before you need. . . . Isn't that so, Alice? There's

a bloody lot of nonsense they teach boys there, and you can thank your good luck you're quit of it."

John would never meet his father in that mood; he knew it was useless to talk. He had known too that his father did not want him to go, and that his request had been audacious. Only because they had talked about the pearling trade had he found courage to ask. Now, while his father glowered at him, he discreetly kept silence, but after supper, while helping his mother wash up the things, he said, "Mother, I *must* go one day to the mainland, I can't live here always, can I?"

"Yes, you must go one day."

"Will father let me?"

"Yes, he'll have to let you go later on."

"Why not now?"

"Do you want to go away and leave us?"

After a pause — "No ——" Then after another pause, "Will you always stay here?"

"Yes, always."

"Why?"

"We are happy here, we want nothing else, and we want to keep you with us as long as we can. Your father would miss your help."

"Oh, I can't do much," said the boy depreciatingly, but proud of the tribute. Then after a long pause, "One day I must go — I feel that. You won't mind, mother ——"

"I shall want you to come back sometimes."

"Oh, I'll come back sure enough. That's partly why I want to go — for the fun of coming back."

"How different you'll be," smiled his mother. "Well, wait another season, you're only sixteen and a half."

"Another year," he mused. "Yes, I'll wait."

III

That evening he had a desire to get away by himself. The house seemed very small, his father seemed very big and in the way. He slipped out at the back door and ran down towards the sea.

The island was lit by the light of a half-moon and the sands shone smooth and white. The boy moved silently to the sea's edge.

With a rhythmical beat small wavelets slapped the shore, and in the shallow ripples that ran up the beach were minute phosphorescent globules. How still it was except for that monotonous sound. How big was the sea — how enduring the land. It was at night they talked to one another. John let the waves wash over his feet. Life, he felt, was extraordinarily sweet, it was big, stretching to the horizon and far beyond, and all for him. Glorious! and how splendid to live! He would himself find out everything — explore the mainland and all the great cities. He felt that he was loved. Life and earth loved him — the sea too. — Oh, damn these clothes. In a moment they were off and hurled up the beach. That was better. Slowly he walked out into the water. He stood thigh deep and looked at his own reflection. His five fingers he rested on the surface of the water. Five other fingers had come to meet them. He could see the reflections of the stars too. A moment ago he had felt like plunging in and splashing, but now something checked him. He moved his hands, making smooth ripples, then stood still. On the beach he could hear the land-crabs scuttling in and out of their holes. He



THE ISLAND

23

had not heard them at first because of the plash of the waves. Now he heard them distinctly.

He waded into shallow water and regarded with a sense of satisfaction his own wet legs shining in the moonlight. Then, quite unexpectedly, he felt depressed. He was suddenly conscious of an ache within him. It was a warm smouldering pain. The sea beat upon the land with the same monotonous plash, but both sea and land were changed. They had become incomplete, and he felt fragmentary. He was discontented as never before, yet tingling with excitement. He began to walk along the hard sand by the edge of the waves. For a while he found relief in quick movement. Then he paused again, and, looking round at the sea and sky, found them extremely empty. They had become different, yet their will towards him was the same. They could love him again if they were complete, but something was lacking. He walked on again, puzzled, and soon came to the place where a host of crabs were devouring the remains of the stingaree. He thought of Coffee and of his fear of devil-devils. The thought pleased him — it brought a new interest.

Inland, the dunes rose in ridges one behind the other, covered with acacia scrub. He picked his way between the low bushes, disturbing tribes of wallabies and bandicoots, which made great squeaking and scuttling. Soon he reached the edge of the flat clearing beyond the dunes. As he approached the solitary hut he had a feeling of awe, mingled with a hope that he would see something strange. Never by night had he been here before, and he saw for the first time what a bare, ugly spot it was. It was quite cut off from the sea; the sand-dunes en-

closed it. It was more lonely than the beach, yet he was glad to be there, it suited his mood. He crouched down holding his knees. For an hour, he sat there very still and silent, watching the shadow of the hut shift on the white sand and the moon sink low in the sky. His feelings changed slowly. He had lost interest in devils, that had been only a passing whim, of which he was ashamed. Now he was cold and sleepy. A thin mist hung between the dunes. He shivered and stood up, then walked in the direction of the homestead thinking with pleasant anticipation of his bed.

IV

The cutter *Shark* lay at her moorings off the landing-beach of Kanna Island, and moved almost imperceptibly to the small undulations that lapped her sides. It was afternoon, and the sun blazed from a clear sky. Pomfrey had hoisted the main-sail, which hung motionless in the calm air. In its shadow he lounged smoking. His eyes watched the shore, and followed the figure of John Sherwin walking along the beach. He smiled as he saw the youth strip and wade into the sea and begin swimming out in his direction. John swam with a leisurely, easy stroke, and soon raised his dripping sun-browned body over the gunwale. He shook the water out of his hair and squatted near Pomfrey's feet. "You haven't told me yet what you think of my skins," he began.

Pomfrey eyed him, amused and phlegmatic. "Well, I don't say you haven't a fine lot of them! How many did you say?"

"One hundred and forty-two, and the smallest more than two feet wide."



THE ISLAND

25

"Of course you might sell them, but I don't know anyone on this coast who'd buy. You see they are an out-of-the-way sort of thing altogether. There was a German up here last year who tried to start a turtle-canning factory; perhaps he'd have bought them. He had an eye open for odd things. They should have a value, but they are out of the run of ordinary trade." He paused, conscious of the damping effect of his remarks, then added: "You must have worked pretty hard to get all that number."

"Eighteen months — and now I'm going to the mainland to see if I can't do something with them. Anyway, I shall find something to do there. I've been here long enough."

Pomfrey chuckled. "You'll have to have your hair cut, my lad, and you'll have to wear some clothes too. And what does your father say? Has he given his consent?"

John didn't answer for a moment, then: "I shall go in spite of father," he said. "I can't stay here always. I'm damned if I will," he added with quiet intensity.

"What reason does your father give for keeping you?"

"He doesn't give any reason. He just gets angry and says I've everything I want here."

"And haven't you?"

"No."

Pomfrey spat emphatically into the sea and looked with great relish and amusement at the young man.

"I've knocked up and down this coast, and on many other coasts too, for a long time before you were born, but I've never met such a queer couple as you and your father. A man gone wild, clean away from all the rest

and his son like him. How old are you? Seventeen. Well, your father has been on this island for twenty years and never to the mainland all that time. It's strange that he wants to keep you here."

"What made my father come here first?"

"There was a hospital for natives, like there is on Fenton now. Your father used to keep the stock. Dr. Hicksey, he was boss here, and your mother was matron. The doctor and your father were a queerly matched couple, and your mother too." He chuckled at recollections.

"Tell me about the doctor? When did he go?"

"No, my boy, it's not for me to tell you all that old story, and I don't to this day know the rights and wrongs of it, but there have been queer happenings on this island, mighty queer. When the doctor was here, things were not as they are now."

"Tell me, do tell me about it. What happened to the doctor?"

"He's dead," admitted Pomfrey.

"How did he die? When?"

"No, no, it's not for me to say anything," said Pomfrey meditatively, "but it's queer that your father's so set against your going to the mainland."

"Why's that, do you think?"

Pomfrey, who had been gazing into the sea for the last few seconds, raised his little blue eyes to the young man's face. "He can't expect to keep you here always can he? Then most boys of your age have gone to school and have learnt to read and write and know something about money too. Why, if you were over in Kaimera they'd think you were a savage, an aborigine."

"Why doesn't my father let me go?"



THE ISLAND

27

"Maybe he thinks that things are just as well as they are, and he's no mind to alter them."

"*What* is it you mean?" said John exasperated.

Pomfrey again raised his eyes to the boy's face, then looked back at the sea and spat. After a short silence the old man asked:

"When you go swimming about these bays, do you see many sharks?"

"A good many."

"Do they sniff about at all?"

"No, not much, sometimes they are a little inquisitive."

"Are you frightened of them?"

"No, they're quite harmless and frightened at any splash."

"The doctor who used to be here on these islands was eaten by sharks they say. He was a great swimmer and afraid of nothing. I remember when I first brought him to the island he dived in just here and brought up my anchor that I had lost."

"That's not much of a dive," said John peering down.

"No? But he was town bred. . . . A fine swimmer and hard to kill, I should think."

"He must have been a fool to let the sharks get him. They are as timid as boody-rats."

"Are they now," mused Pomfrey. "And what if the sharks didn't kill him? There was a time when he and your mother were mighty taken up with one another."

John crimsoned. "Why do you say all this?"

Again Pomfrey's eyes twinkled. "Well, when a man wants to get a woman, he will do some odd things to get her, and take a lot of trouble too — even kill a hundred

and forty-two stingaree and dry their skins in the sun."

John looked at the old man with wide eyes. For a moment he wondered what a woman could have to do with stingaree; then, as the ripples spread from a stone thrown into a pool, he became conscious that the idea of woman was already of importance — how big an importance he couldn't guess. The ripples spread outward in a great arc, which in the distance diffused into clouds of mist stretching to the wide horizon — infinite. Pomfrey's words brought him back with a jerk.

"I mean no harm to any of you, my lad. But you're growing up and should know the ways of life, and if your father did do for the doctor one fine night (and I wouldn't be surprised if he did) I think no worse of him, but give him the credit for his pluck. I can keep my own counsel, no fear about that, and of the two I always liked your father best. The doctor — well, he was a clever fellow, but as cold as a fish, as cold as a fish."

"You think my father killed him," said John slowly, puzzled and almost stupefied by the clash of ideas.

"I don't say I think he killed him, but I think he *might* have killed him, seeing what hot-tempered men they both were. And then it isn't natural for two men to live alone on an island where there's only one woman. As I say, the doctor was hard-hearted and cold, a difficult man to get on with."

"And if he did kill him, what difference does it make?" asked John, still puzzled.

"To you and me it makes no difference — he knows I'm his friend. But over there," he jerked his head towards the mainland, "it means hanging. Mind you, I don't say he did it, but it has crossed my mind before now

that he might have done it, and that being the case, it would account for his keeping so much to the island and wanting to keep you here too."

"Why should he want to keep me? I'd never tell, even if he had."

"I suppose it's like this — he thinks things are safe now and wants to keep them just as they are without change."

John impulsively started to speak, then checked himself, and for some minutes they both remained silent. Pomfrey sucked unconcernedly at his pipe. The boy meditated, staring at his hands and brown arms, at the white deck, at the sea, and finally at the sky. The blue clear water, the white line of the beach with the tumbled sand-dunes behind, and the over-arching vault of the sky were silent and yet expressive. To both the man and the boy they were the end and the beginning, they contained all things; and in their expressive silence they registered impartially the fact, or the supposition, of murder.

"Anyway," said John at length, "I'm not going to stay here always. I mean to go to the mainland. Will you take me?"

Pomfrey shook his head. "Not without the boss's orders."

"Then will you speak for me? Tell him I must go!"

"I have said a word or two to him already, but he's not an easy man to argue with."

"Have you asked him that I might go?"

The old man grunted.

"Thank you," said John embarrassed. "I never knew." Then after a short pause: "He'll let me go in the end. Mother says that he's sure to, that he can't

help it — But I get — longing, longing to go. . . .” Then after a pause, this time a longer one: “Do men often kill men?”

Pomfrey smiled at the naive question. This absence of education and of the simplest knowledge was a source of great amusement.

“I’ve known some five cases, not counting black men,” he said.

“What happened to them?”

“Two of them was hung. One took to the bush and hasn’t been heard of since. Another, old Morat, who killed a brace of niggers, you can see on the beach of Kaimera any day, and the last — oh he’s quite a fancy gent, got a house in Perth, and married a rich wife. He made his pile up on the pearl coast.”

“That’s where I want to go. Do you think they’d take me as a diver?”

“Maybe. You’re as good as any black boy I’ve seen at the job; but it’s a dog’s life — not for a white man.”

From the beach a halloo was sounded and John’s name was called across the water. Sherwin’s burly figure was seen waving a signal from the verandah of the house.

“I have to help father with some sheep,” explained John, “I forgot. Thank you for speaking to him. I’ll ask him again soon.” Without troubling to stand up and dive he slipped over the side of the boat and swam towards the shore.

v

The work with the sheep did not take very long, but the sun was setting by the time father and son walked back towards the homestead. John saw that his father

was on the whole in a good mood, and he decided to make a bid for liberty. He plunged straight to the heart of the difficulty.

"Father, I want to go to the mainland. I've got a hundred and forty-two stingaree skins that I want to trade with."

Sherwin's face darkened immediately. The boy looked at his father very critically as he waited in suspense. He remembered how afraid he used to be of that look, but now he had no fear, and he thought that in the end his father would yield. There was a great strength in his father's face and a kind of honest stupidity; he loved him for being just as he was. He hated to go against his father but yet had to do so for the sake of his own life. He tried to think of his father killing a man. It was just remotely possible. But how deeply he would have to be moved for that! It would not be done lightly. Perhaps to protect his son or his wife, but for no slight thing. John could read his present scowl; it was part real annoyance, and part the habit of the dominating head of the household. He felt very drawn to his father while thus opposing him.

"To trade with stingaree skins?" Sherwin sneered. "They're worth nothing. Who's going to buy them?"

"I don't know, but I shall find some one. Pomfrey will take them in the cutter for me."

"So you've been talking to Pomfrey? The old fool!"

"Yes."

"Why, you don't even know the value of money."

"That's partly why I want to go. I shall learn. I don't learn anything here."

Sherwin remained silent, red in the face and gloomy.

"Father, Pomfrey won't take me unless you tell him. I must go. Please let me go."

"So you've asked him already, have you?"

"Yes."

There was silence as they trudged on over the shifting, light sand. Then Sherwin said gruffly, "You can bide a bit longer."

"You always say that. Eighteen months ago I was to wait a year. Now I want to go at once. Tomorrow, when Pomfrey sails."

"Hold your mouth."

"I won't," cried John, stung to anger. "I will talk and I will go. I'm not afraid, and if I can't go by the cutter I shall swim."

"You fool," said Sherwin, getting a deeper red. "It's thirty miles and a strong current."

"I don't care; then I shall drown."

Sherwin stopped in his stride and faced his son.

"See here. I've had enough of this nonsense. Shut down, drop it. Not another word."

John was defiant with unflinching eyes. "I shall go. I don't care, I shall go."

Sherwin's hand swung out in a half circle and caught the boy on the ear, sending him flying. John felt chiefly surprise at finding his face and hands in the sand, then anger flared in his heart so that it nearly burst. He scrambled up and with clenched fist made for his father. But at the first step he stumbled and came down, kneeling on the sand. Something was roaring through his head; he felt sick and was trembling.

Sherwin regarded him for a few seconds, then catching his elbow, lifted him to his feet.

"Can you stand now, boy?" he asked. John nodded, the roaring was still in his ears. "Now, no more of this nonsense. You can walk on home."

With an effort John could just hold his balance; he freed his arm from his father's support with an angry gesture. They walked back in silence side by side.

VI

At the evening meal few words were spoken. That there was angry blood between her two men Alice saw at once, and she was careful, fearing another outburst, to speak only of superficial things. Sherwin ate fast in large mouthfuls with sullen looks. John, equally sullen, ate nothing, but drank several cups of tea. The situation was difficult for him, it was unusual, never before had there been such tension. He had never come so near to hating his father, but even now part of his mind was trying to excuse him, though the other part, and that was master, was adamant, and full of rage. Sure of his mother's sympathy, he longed for her support, but honour bound him from saying a word. If it were any other trouble he could go to her, but against his father he could never speak. It would spoil for him both his idea of himself and of his mother, if together they condemned his father's unjust actions. Instinct and habit held him true here; there had never been and never could be factions among them: the many years of isolated life on the island bound them fast together. His father was almost a part of himself, a part to be striven with and opposed, but not to be hated; and if he must strive now for freedom, he could do it all himself. He didn't need help, for he knew that he would never submit to tyranny.

After supper it was usual for John to help his mother wash-up while Sherwin sat and smoked on the verandah. It was this solitary companionship with his mother that he now wished to avoid, for he knew that she would then question him; besides he wanted to be alone, and far, far away from his father whom he would not be in such danger of hating at a distance. Yet, if he rose to go out, his father would probably call him back, and this would make him feel more angry than ever. He was saved from this danger by Sherwin's walking out on to the verandah and calling to Alice to fetch him his tobacco. John seized the opportunity, and running out of the back door, made for the sand-dunes and the bushes.

When Alice returned, she found the kitchen empty. For a moment she hesitated as to whether she should mention the boy's absence to her husband or whether she should wait. She thought she understood his desire to be away by himself, it would be better to let him be alone, and easier perhaps to talk with her husband if he were the first to notice the boy's absence. She decided to wait. Later, when she had finished washing-up and drying the supper plates she came and sat beside Sherwin on the verandah. In the gathering darkness she could not see his face clearly, but she at once felt that he was still in a gloomy and depressed mood, so she sat near him and did not speak. After a while, he asked:

"Where's John got to?"

"I don't know, he went off by himself."

"Did he say anything?"

"No."

There was silence again for some minutes, then she

said: "Tell me, John, what is it that's happened?"

Sherwin puckered his brow and stared out into the night. "I hit him," he said. Alice remained silent, sitting very still. Then after another pause, "He defied me."

Alice was tempted to question but checked herself, knowing that if she kept silence the whole story would come out. She felt an extraordinary wave of love for her two men, and pity for both, especially for the angry and remorseful spirit that was now struggling to tell the story of his fear and weakness.

His voice began speaking into the darkness and she listened, thrilled, knowing that he would speak of that subject which had never been spoken of since the night he had first claimed her there on the verandah. "He wants to go to the mainland.—It's natural he should want to go, but I—I hate all that over there—all that we have left—that misery. . . . Things go so well here as they are. . . . One never knows what might come out. People seeing the boy might ask questions—some damned fool come nosing about. They'd talk to him, perhaps put him against us. They might—they would talk about *him*. . . . It may be fancy, but I wish the lad could stay here." Again he was silent. "My God, I've never felt it like this before." The words came in pain, "But the land over there——" he stretched out his hand and moved it in a wide arc, "it seems to be tainted—I want no link with it.—We've been happy here, Alice, and he's been happy. If he goes, he'll forget his happiness, forget how to be happy. They'll get hold of him and he'll forget—and that story, he's sure to hear some of it. . . . I

don't say it's so very likely, but anything might come out."

Again the silence of the night, now quite dark, settled upon them.

Alice laid a hand on her man's sleeve. "But, John, he must go sometime — and soon. For more than a year he has been longing to go. See how he's worked at his skins. Think how it was with you while you were here alone. He must go, if only to find a wife; he's restless. You *must* let him go. As for the other, that will never come out. It's too long dead. The boy is to be trusted, and if there is a risk we must take that. There's not much. He'll soon be lost in the crowd. He must have his life, and the life of youth. . . . Perhaps he may come back to us, perhaps go back to all that we have left. He's a good boy, and I too wish that he could stay always."

Sherwin bent his face in his hands, then suddenly raising his head: "Alice, I dread the mainland. We have been too lucky to escape it all — all the beastliness and dirt of it." He paused, hoping that Alice would speak, but she said nothing. Then, after listening for a while to the soft noises of the night, "If he must go, when is it to be?"

"Oh soon! Tomorrow, if Pomfrey sails. After this it is better."

"Very well, I'll tell him."

Alice checked the wave of warm feeling that rose in her heart, knowing that any show of it now would be resented. She felt that he must have the triumph and proud bitterness of his victory alone. He stood up, and for a moment took her hand in his, squeezed it hard, then quickly turned and walked down the verandah steps out into the night.

He had no immediate desire to find his son, though

that possibility was in his mind, but he too wanted to be alone, to feel the air wide and open to his lungs, and to move over the earth quickly. Happiness and pain mingled in him, his fear was almost dead; life was again as in youth, urging him with strong purpose. The depths of his soul moved, and the new resolve came out of the depth with exultation. Under the dark dome of the sky he could feel free and untrammelled, and in the familiar and yet ever strange quality of the night his body and senses were touched to harmony.

VII

After John had escaped from the house, he ran steadily towards the north of the island. At first he wanted simply to get away and to avoid any chance of being called back, but later he ran for the feeling of power that it produced and because he found pleasure in the sure and steady movements of limbs. For only a short distance had he kept inland under the cover of the bushes, he had then made for the shore where the sand was smooth; he ran where it was hardest, just at the limit of the waves, sometimes splashing in and out of shallow pools. He knew that for more than six miles the island stretched northward. There was space in front of him, and he needed to be far away where he could think and plan by himself.

After some three miles he stopped running, prepared now to think out his problem and his means of freedom. He walked on quickly, still anxious to put distance between himself and his father. He was rebellious, the island seemed stale to him. All the little and familiar things that it contained he knew, and they had ceased to be satisfying. He now desired bigger adventures than

diving after turtle or fish-spearing. With his stingaree skins he believed he could do great things; but if his father would not let him go and take them with him, then he would go without them. But how? The idea of swimming all the way was ludicrous; drowning would be the certain result. He must get Pomfrey to take him, but that would be difficult. As he walked on, thoughts came quickly and a plan of action presented itself. In the morning he would wait till Pomfrey was almost ready to start for Kaimera, then he would slip into the sea unnoticed and swim out far from the coast and wait for Pomfrey in mid-sea. He would then swim to the boat and persuade the old man to take him on board. All would be well in that he would get to the mainland and evade his father, but he was sorry not to be able to say good-bye to his mother. This thought worried him, but it was not sufficiently an obstacle to make him hold back. A message could be sent by Pomfrey. But why, why, couldn't his father let him go? This was impossible to understand. Then for a little he wondered whether his father had killed the doctor as Pomfrey had hinted, but this line of thought didn't much interest him, and he had no doubt that, if it were so, the doctor thoroughly deserved killing.

Before long he came to where the sand-dunes break away to the narrow spit of land which forms the northernmost cape of the island. He walked now more slowly, sometimes splashing in and out of the water; and then as the mood took him treading very silently the dry sand. Pomfrey's words about man's desire to seek for women came to his mind. That was, perhaps, part of what now urged him to go. Not before had he thought definitely

of this, but he could now admit that he had long wished to meet women. He would be afraid of them and very nervous, or else, he imagined, very bold; his fear would compel him to be near them, eager for encounters. He thought of exciting meetings and absurd and romantic affinities. Such dreams, very vague for the most part, he had often dreamed, now he believed that they might become true.

There was satisfaction in having come to the end of the land. The place was lonely and wild; the sea on three sides and the deep sky overhead. Gentle plashing of waves was the only sound. In this solitude his imagination could almost see himself; he could talk to himself as to a person whom he loved and wished to understand. Ah, wonderful air of the night enveloping everything, fertile with the promises of growth, covering and withholding thousands of desires and the seeds of desire. The womanliness of existence was about him in the night, soft and full of mystery.

Close along the break of the waves there was a white ridge composed of small fragments of broken shells. This ridge was touched by the moonlight and shone brightly. Along its edge John walked up and down. He walked to its extremity and then turned and walked back. Again and again he paced its length, sometimes pausing to look out to sea over the moon-dappled waters, then pacing again the line of the beach with eyes bent, as if mesmerized by its whiteness. There was only a faint breeze and the night was very still. A gentle silence hung over the land. The boy on the beach and the waves that broke at his feet were alone restless. Never tiring, the waves broke against the shore, building and destroying

the line of fragments upon which he walked. Once he stopped and dipped his hands in the water which was warm as his own blood. It was warm with life, and the forces within him were akin to that response. He had come to the limits of the land, beyond him was the ever-moving and passionate sea.

VIII

It was past midnight when John struck homewards over the sand-dunes, making the shortest route across the inland plateau of the island. When within about a mile of the house he suddenly halted, feeling that he was observed. He looked quickly about him, and, at the same moment that he saw his father standing near some high bushes, he heard his name called. He stood still, making no response. He was not now in the least nervous or embarrassed; the long run across country had opened his lungs, so that every sense in his body was in tone, but mingled with the sense of youthful power was the germ of a new interest in his father and a wonderment about his night wanderings.

Sherwin advanced with something of a frown, his eyes very hard on his son's face. He spoke abruptly in a voice harsh and deliberate. "I ask your pardon, John, I should not have hit you. It's right and natural for you to want to go, and I'll tell Pomfrey in the morning that he can wait a bit and load up your skins."

The boy was not expecting this. It was the one blow he was not prepared for. They stood dumbly for a while, neither of them able to speak. Then Sherwin in the same rough voice went on: "Before you go, I've something to say to you. Come with me now, I can best

tell what I've to say at the place where the thing was done." He abruptly turned and led the way through the scrub that grew high and thick. They went on in silence down a narrow ravine that opened on the clearing in which the fishing-hut stood. Outside the hut Sherwin checked and stood with his back to it. John watched him, awed by his manner.

"It's twenty years since I've been to the mainland," he began, "and if I live twenty more I shall never go again. Over there I've no place, and your mother has no place." Then after a pause, his eyes fiercely holding his son's in the dim light, "Eighteen years ago I killed a man in this hut here. It was done in fair fight, man to man. I have no regrets, and my conscience is clear. On the mainland, if they knew it, they'd hang me without question, and your mother they'd hound into the streets to get her bread as best she could, or starve." Sherwin's voice rang with a bitter, angry note. John had never known his father like this; he felt a tremendous admiration, a living sympathy, gratitude and pride in this confidence. "I have no regrets," Sherwin repeated. "In this hut. . . . I visit it nearly every day. . . . I keep my things here. Coffee, he's a savage and frightened of devils. He knows. . . . He was here and is afraid. In there I killed him. . . . I find the place convenient and I have no remorse. And it's not fear that keeps me away from the mainland. If I wanted to go, I should go and take the risks. I stay here because here I have all that I need: a good wife, work, this island which is my own and which I love, and contentment. Over there is everything that I hate — restlessness, greed, drink, the hunt for women and gold, hypocrisy, every-

thing to prevent happiness. . . . That's what I found it. Here I have a home, you know what kind, and you've been happy. . . .

"Well, it's natural you should want to go. I can see that. I was against it, because such happiness as I have had is too rare. I wanted things to go on as they were. . . . You'll hear stories perhaps of the doctor and of the past time. . . . When they see you, they will talk. No one knows what happened, but they will invent. Don't listen to it, my son. Be content to let that rest. I shall not tell you either. There was great misery for your mother, and she would not wish it told. What I've said is enough. You carry my life in your hand; don't wish to find out more, but I can swear before God that I have no regrets, and that I would do what I have done again in the same cause. If I had sinned, I should not have been happy as I have been. Do you understand?"

John's emotion was too great for him to speak. With eyes full of tears he nodded in affirmation. This secret that he carried was like a treasure of infinite price, a trust never to be betrayed. By this confidence his father had raised him to equality, given him a dignity beyond his years. His father's soul had been bared to him. He wondered at, without understanding, the past pains and fires whose embers now glowed in the blackness.

Sherwin continued, his voice now not harsh, but deep and full. "I wish for your mother's sake that there had been other children. She'll miss you badly, so shall I. . . . On the mainland you will find yourself behind in many things. There's money and learning. . . . Well, you'll pick up enough to get on with — and women

— you'll be after the women for sure. When you've been through with enough of them, and there's little you'll find in most, get a simple woman like your mother for your wife, one country bred, no town woman. A man to be happy must have a wife. Then maybe if you're sick of the rottenness over there, you can come back here and bring your wife, and give your mother some grandchildren to lighten her age. But this you must never do: no trips to and fro with town friends. That's partly why I've spoken tonight. Do you promise? "

"Yes, I promise," said John, "but may I come back alone? "

"If you need to, not otherwise — unless you should mean to stay."

Sherwin took a few paces up and down. It was quite dark and the moon had set. John longed to be able to speak something of the love and gratitude of his heart, but not even under the cover of the darkness of the night was he able to find any words. At last he brought out an inadequate "Thank you" as the sum of his emotions.

"Thank your mother, boy, it was she who brought me to see that you must go; but of what I've told you — not a word to her. She knows it all of course, but never speak of it."

Then changing his tone, "In the morning I'll fit you up with some clothes and some money that I've put by and that you can make a start on; and I daresay Pomfrey will give you advice as to how best to behave in Kaimera. . . . We'll get those skins aboard. Don't be too much in a hurry to sell them, they may be of more value than either of us reckon."

John still found nothing to say as they walked towards the house; he was not able to express his feelings in words and not willing to talk of material details.

Sherwin chatted for a short time of tomorrow's prospects; then he too became silent, unable to sustain the weight of such fleeting things. They walked home together side by side in the darkness.

CHAPTER II

THE PORT OF KAIMERA

I

A SQUALID row of bedrooms enclosed the yard of Flynn's Hotel, Kaimera. They had been built by Flynn and his son to suit the requirements of a growing establishment, and consisted of corrugated iron and hessian nailed to uprights and then profusely whitewashed inside and out. In one of these rooms John Sherwin spent his first night on the mainland. He had come there with Pomfrey, who was to keep him under his charge till some promising opening was found.

After the excitement of the day, John was heartily glad to be now by himself, able to review his recent experience. The time had been long and crowded, containing, for the grown youth, a thousand impressions, such as usually are absorbed by the slow growth of childhood. In the early morning he had rushed down to the beach and had swum out to tell Pomfrey that his father had at last given his consent. Then they had worked together stowing the skins in the hold. When that was done, his mother had insisted on cutting his hair, so that he should not be laughed at by people on shore. His father had produced a pair of dungarees hardly worn, a slouch hat and two blue shirts. He had felt much altered and dignified by the new clothes. His father had also

given him ten pounds, which was sewn into the belt of his trousers. This he was to spend little of, to keep as much as possible for emergencies. Then there had been the good-bye to his mother; she had cried a little and this had brought tears to John's eyes, but what had left the deepest impression of all was sailing away from the island and hearing his father's last farewell shout, very faint across the water. That had indeed given his heart a wrench, and he was glad when the figures on the crest of the sand-hill were at last out of sight. He had then felt very sad, sadder by far than when saying good-bye; but he was happy in his melancholy.

When the lighthouse was sighted, and the shore became visible stretching in long sand-dunes north and south, John's sense for new adventures burned up. The boats and ships anchored off the sand-banks by the river's mouth excited him beyond words. There was a trading steamer loading wool at the pier. John silently gazed at the bulk of her black hull, and at the scores of people on the decks. It was almost incredible that so vast a building should move over the sea. He could have wondered at it all day, had there not been so many other things to look at. There were the men on the pier, others in dinghies who rowed from ship to ship and shouted to one another.

Pomfrey had dropped anchor, then had pulled to the pier, where they had scrambled up a rope-ladder. There had been the ride in the train, wonderful in itself, three miles across Babbage Island, and at last Kaimera. To a civilized man this was but a typical coastwise port consisting of square, one-storey houses, painted for the most part pink or white. The streets were wide and bare, with no green save that of agaves and pepper trees; over-

head, a blazing sun. To John the sight of so many people had been disturbing, it had made him feel both shy and eager. The women were different from what he had expected; they were different from his mother, the clothes they wore making them look odd, and strange to his eyes. He thought the people looked unhappy and uncomfortable, and felt sometimes a kind of disappointment, though frequently he saw faces that he wished to know. Such were his early impressions, but later, when he had met many of Pomfrey's acquaintances and had had to answer their greeting and questions, he longed to be away by himself, to get things sorted in his mind, and to avoid being overdone with impressions. But he was not able to get away; there were people everywhere; so all the evening he had sat dumbly, and rather miserably, listening with growing boredom to the chatter of the bar, while Pomfrey and his friends drank numberless glasses.

Now, alone and in bed, he was glad to think over all these things. He assured himself that in time he would get accustomed to it all, then the next moment he doubted, feeling there was so much new and strange to find out. But he was wholly glad that he had come. Tomorrow he would not be so shy of all those other people, who of course understood so much. Things that they took for granted appeared to him marvellous, and he remembered the light in the courtyard which had sprung into existence when Flynn had touched a little knob near the door. He had not liked to say anything about this at the time for fear of being laughed at, but now he determined to see for himself.

Out in the yard it was very dark and he could hear Pomfrey snoring in the next bedroom. Everybody was

asleep. Quickly John crossed the yard, felt for the button and pushed it down. The light sprang into existence. At once rather scared he pushed up the knob — darkness. After a pause he pushed it down again, once more there was the light. Off — on, off — on, it was obedient to his finger. He tiptoed very quietly towards it — a glass globe with a little looped red-hot wire: what an extraordinary light! Gingerly he put out his hand. It was warm, but did not burn like a flame. For a long while he gazed surprised at its steady glow. It was marvellous that the pressing of a knob so far away should make a light; this alone was wonderful as a dream, and tomorrow there was all the mainland and all his life for discoveries. He gazed at the lamp in an ecstasy of happy anticipation, then tiptoed back to the knob. When again it was dark he glanced for a moment up at the familiar stars overhead. Then assured by the recognition of what was normal and enduring, he quietly crossed the court and with a shiver of happiness curled himself up in bed.

II

Early next morning before any of the inhabitants of Kaimera were about, John made a tour of inspection of the town. From one wide street to another he turned, filled with wonder for the size and numerousness of the houses; most of all he was impressed by the new Coffee Palace just completed, which was two stories high with a double verandah. When his curiosity was satisfied he went down to the pier-head, had a look at the small engine and train, then started to run out towards the sea. It was easy going, along the boarded way beside the railway line, and it amused him to look down between the

THE PORT OF KAIMERA 49

cracks and to see space beneath his feet. To the end of the pier it was three miles, but well worth the run. He wanted to bathe in deep sea, not liking the look of the river estuary where the water was muddy and where large yellow and black water-snakes were now and then to be seen. Much to his disappointment he found that the steamer which last evening had been loading wool had sailed in the night, but he found other boats anchored in the shelter of the sand-banks. He dived in and swam round for an inspection of the various craft, finishing up on the *Shark* where he surprised the silent and abstracted Toby who had been left in charge. They breakfasted together on some bread and some rather scaly fish-soup made of sea-water and snapper hacked into chunks and boiled. After breakfast John returned to his clothes on the pier, and then back to Kaimera.

By this time the streets were full of people, and John hurried back to Flynn's Hotel, disliking to feel himself alone in a strange town. The rest of the morning was taken up by meeting various of Pomfrey's acquaintances, beach-combers of all kinds, including the notorious Morat, the murderer, who had not only killed a white man but had three niggers flung in to complete his reputation. He was a little sandy man with rheumy eyes, and John thought he looked very mild. These gentlemen were all told of the stingaree skins, and in the afternoon a party was made up to visit the *Shark*.

Depreciating and pessimistic remarks regarding so unusual a freight were the preliminaries of a business deal. Pomfrey, who had arranged with the elder Sherwin that he was to have a commission on the sale, did his best to speak up, and after much banter on both sides asked for

an offer. A miserable five pounds was suggested, but Pomfrey was not to be gulled to that extent, and after further discussion and a deal of good-natured blasphemy ten pounds was reached. Pomfrey was not going to commit himself. He knew the beach-combers and their methods of trade and determined to hold on for a day or two on the chance of a better bid.

All this talk seemed to John very stupid, and he soon became indifferent. Ten pounds or a hundred were much the same to him. He vaguely understood that on the mainland money was necessary. It still seemed absurd that people should have to pay to live, but it wasn't worth bothering about. For the present he had enough. The skins had only been a pretext. He had already lost interest, and felt restless in the presence of so much talk and so little action.

The next morning, when John again ran down the pier for his bathe, he saw that there was a newly arrived cutter anchored at the extreme end of the sand bar. Evidently she had come in late on the previous evening. John soon stripped and swam out towards her, curious for a closer view. There was only one man on deck, and he was occupied at the small box-like cook-house forward. Very quietly John swam up behind him and then trod water, while he compared the various qualities of the new arrival with those of the *Shark*. The contrast was marked, for the *Shark* was old, having had no money spent on her for a good ten years, while this boat was the very acme of all that was well-cared-for and ship-shape. Her painted sides gleamed in the morning sun and made complementary reflections in the limpid water. Her lines were delicate and tapering, suggestive of speed,

THE PORT OF KAIMERA 51

and as the wavelets tossed against her hull she seemed to stir like some bright creature of the air, eager to spread her wings and skim out over the sea. Thrilled with admiration for so beautiful a craft, John swam nearer. Within about ten feet he stopped and had a closer look at the broad back of the man who, as he could now see, was frying fish at a fire. He wanted much to find out about this new arrival which so far surpassed in appearance the other boats of the port. He did not know how best to open a conversation, but was unwilling to swim away tamely without further satisfying his curiosity. The whim took him to dive under the boat. He came up with rather a splutter, shaking the water out of his hair and ears. On the cutter the man had put down his frying-pan and was gazing at him with a fierce expression from under thick black brows. For a moment they looked mutely at one another, then came the natural though disconcerting question:

"What the hell are you doing?"

John felt abashed by the man's uncompromising aspect and replied in words that he felt were weak and illusory, "Just swimming about."

"Well g-go and swim somewhere else."

There was a slight stutter on the "go" which seemed to add emphasis to the command, though John could discern a certain amused interest. At a loss what to say he stared blankly at the broad, solid face and the heavy, straight brows. He felt extremely foolish in this encounter which he had pushed himself into, and to avoid looking so, submerged himself with an upward lift of his hands. Under water he made towards the boat and came up very silently beneath the wide counter.

From here he heard another voice speaking. The tones were clear and full of vitality. "Who are you talking to, Tom?"

"There was a red-headed boy come up out of the sea — God knows where from."

"Is he there?"

"No, damned if he is."

"Where has he gone to?"

"Under water again like a damned fish."

John heard the footsteps on the deck and the two men expressing their amused surprise at his strange appearance and disappearance. After a little he submerged again and swam a short distance from the boat. When he came to the surface he was hailed.

A tall slim man in silk pyjamas with a black beard was standing on the deck. "Do you want anything?" he shouted in a voice that sounded eager and full of zest for any incident that might offer novelty and entertainment.

"No, I was just having a morning swim," said John, more at his ease. "I came to look at your boat; she's such a beauty."

"Where have you come from?"

"The pier."

"That's a far swim; are you not afraid of the sharks?"

"No, they eat fish; I've never had one after me."

During this exchange, John had swum nearer and was now treading water. The tall man continued his questions.

"You seem pretty well at home in the sea, where did you get to just now?"

John smiled as he answered, "Under your boat."

THE PORT OF KAIMERA 53

The two men on board laughed, amused at his resource. The tall man was obviously pleased at this new acquaintance, and relished the humour of the meeting. The other man, whom he addressed as Tom, was now also smiling at John's account of himself. He asked John to give an exhibition of one of his disappearing dives. John at once complied, glad to show off. He swam straight to the bottom where he collected various shells and one or two small sponges. He stayed under as long as he was able, and when he came up triumphantly handed the shells up to be displayed on the white deck of the cutter. Their praise, which was obviously sincere, made him feel well rewarded, and he readily accepted the invitation to clamber on board and breakfast with them.

The tall man, whom John by this time recognized as the "boss," helped him on board with a firm hand-grip. He felt, in spite of the stranger's light and friendly manner, that at this moment he was being looked at critically and with a keen glance. He in his turn looked critically back. His first impression of a slim, wiry figure was confirmed. The stranger's face, well tanned by the sun, was formed of clear-cut, intelligent features; his forehead was high and unlined; his eyes, which were deep-set, were light brown in colour and had a very direct glance, obviously honest; his nose slightly aquiline and large; his lips and chin covered with a well-trimmed moustache and beard. John judged him to be over thirty.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"John Sherwin."

"My name's Arthur Cray and this is Tom Julep. Tom will give you some clothes, and if you like you can

help him with the breakfast. I'm going to dress now." He added with a smile: "At breakfast I shall have questions to ask you."

In the forecastle Julep kept his clothes and all his belongings. He pulled out a pair of trousers and a shirt. "Slip into these; the air will soon dry you," he said. He looked at John critically for a few minutes with a suppressed smile wrinkling the corners of his eyes. John thought him very ugly but somehow attractive. His thick-set limbs took kindly curves, and his heavy features and prominent dimpled chin gave some suggestion of a coarse species of Oriental Buddha filled with self-approbation and a strong sensual zest for life. "The Boss has rather taken to you," he said. "He's not free with his invitations." Then with a knowing wink, "What sort of a place is Kaimera?"

John, having no other town to compare it with, was at a loss. "I don't know," he said, "I've only been there two days."

"Well, isn't that long enough? Is there any good-looking stuff about?"

Again John was at a loss. "What do you mean by stuff?"

"Women, girls, what else?"

John crimsoned. "I don't know."

"I see, you spend your time diving." This was suggested with kindly sarcasm. Then, amused at John's silence, he screwed up his eyes in another critical glance before swinging himself up on to the deck. "What do you think of *The Venture*?" he asked, looking along the white planks of the cutter.

"She's fine; have you come far in her?"



THE PORT OF KAIMERA 55

"Up from Perth — more than five hundred miles, and we are going a long way further. She's a good sailer and seaworthy. It's part of his g-gentlemanly fancy to keep her spick-and-span." Again the slight stutter struck John as singular. It seemed to suggest some weakness in the great physical bulk of the man and at the same time a gentle streak in his primitive animalism. "He sailed her up from Albany by himself with just his wife to help him," Julep went on, "but at Perth I joined as crew. We fixed that up in Paris months ago, now we're off on a twelve months' trip."

"Where are you going to?"

"I don't know. Somewhere up north. He's just pleasure-cruising with his wife."

While Julep occupied himself with the preparation of breakfast, John's attention was captured by the neat array of cups, plates, etc., which seemed to him the extravagant and elegant accessories of a meal. These people on *The Venture* were wonderfully different from all his previous experience. They seemed also to be different from the people of Kaimera. Certainly they had little in common with Pomfrey and his taproom acquaintances. John remembered his half-acknowledged feeling of disappointment and his boredom with the townsfolk. In comparison with Cray's eager vitality the inhabitants of Kaimera seemed stale and unprofitable. His eyes went landward, following his thoughts. The land was far distant, and the early morning scene appeared as wonderfully beautiful, filling him with happiness and the untroubled zest of youth. Long tongues of sand ran out on either side of the river's mouth to meet the blue sea-water. Between these wide-flung spurs

lay the dark mud of the estuary with its ferruginous burden of mangrove thickets. Beyond was the stretch of Babbage Island with yellow sand-dunes and in the hazy distance the roofs of Kaimera, a town of opal and pink, fragile and transparent as a sea-medusa.

When Cray came on deck, John was astonished and even a little awed by his smart appearance. He wore a spotless, well-fitting white suit, and on his head was a wide-brimmed topee. He conveyed an impression of evenly poised alertness, and John was filled with admiration. A few seconds later Mrs. Cray came up the companion-way out of the cabin. She was a woman of twenty-eight or thirty, but she looked considerably younger and on occasions might have been taken for not more than twenty. She was now dressed in an unbleached linen skirt and a tussore blouse embroidered with a line of cerise round the throat and wrists. Her abundant hair was largely concealed by her wide-brimmed hat.

Cray, with an easy smile, introduced John as their first visitor from the mainland, who had swum out to have breakfast with them. The boy was enveloped by successive waves of embarrassment. Never had he imagined any one in the least like Mrs. Cray. The vague girls of his imagination had been wild, shy, long-haired, dark creatures. This woman was a being from another world. She was not woman, to his conception; she was hardly human — there was no gauge by which he could value her. She said good morning to him very simply, and he remained silent, not knowing in the least what to do with his hands, his eyes, or his feet. His native good feeling made it impossible to address her with any speech that was at his command. He felt that he was a fool,



THE PORT OF KAIMERA 57

and that she was self-possessed and wonderful; whether she was beautiful his abashed senses did not dare to decide, but she was wonderful, extraordinarily wonderful. The direct glance of her blue eyes made him look down to the blue waves lapping the boat's side. Seeing that he was embarrassed she moved away and occupied herself with the arrangement of a cloth over the cabin top which was to serve as breakfast-table. Cray took John forward and asked questions concerning places of better anchorage and the best approach to the town up the muddy estuary of the river. When they turned again towards the others, John noticed that Mrs. Cray was absorbed in a long contemplation of the landward scene. In her expression of delight at the awakening beauty of the day he recognized a subdued though deepened reflection of his own feelings of a few moments past.

At breakfast, which they took sitting at the side of the cabin roof, Cray talked with an easy vivacity, doing all he could to put John at his ease. He was surprised at the admission that this was the boy's second day at Kaimera, and asked where he had come from. On hearing of Kanna Island, which was only thirty miles to the westward, he said, "But surely you must have been over to Kaimera before?"

"No."

"Then who lives on Kanna Island?"

"My father and mother, and the black boy Coffee."

"No one else?"

"No. Pomfrey goes across in the cutter from time to time."

"But have you never been to the mainland before? Is this your second day of civilization?"

"Yes."

Cray was now thoroughly interested. He asked, "Have you never been to school?"

"No," admitted John, flushing with shame.

Cray smiled across at his wife. "At last I have met a man who has escaped the blight of education." Then to John he apologized for his many questions. "But I'm so interested," he continued. "You don't know your good fortune, you have not only resisted education, which is the best we others can hope for; you've escaped it altogether. Have you learnt to read?" His question was full of a pleased eagerness.

At first John had been embarrassed by so many questions, but Cray's manner was so unaffected, and his interest so real, that the boy felt almost flattered and now spoke from his natural feeling. "No, mother did want me to learn, and tried to teach me, but I never took to it much. Learning the letters was so senseless."

Cray kept silent for a few seconds while he looked at John with a critical admiration. Here was the raw material of humanity, the child of nature, unspoiled primitive manhood. In those few seconds of criticism he checked the flood of questions that pushed themselves forward. He wanted to know more of the youth, but the knowledge must come slowly, it must unfold itself rather than be dragged forth in disjointed monosyllables. He dropped his eager questioning to a more ordinary tone.

"What does your father do on Kanna?"

"He's a farmer and keeps the stock for the hospital on Fenton Island."

Mrs. Cray, who had been listening with an interest



THE PORT OF KAIMERA 59

not less keen but which appeared more subdued than her husband's, now asked, "Have you never known any one but your father and mother?"

"No one except Pomfrey and Toby who go to and fro on the *Shark*, and of course Coffee, who is a black."

"Have you seen no other woman?"

"Yes, I saw some in Kaimera yesterday."

"When I asked him just now what they were like," Julep laughed, "he couldn't tell me."

"He'll leave that to you, Julep," said Cray, then to John, "I suppose you helped your father with the farm and are now looking out for some job on the mainland."

They talked of possible openings, and John told of his skins. Cray was interested, and said that he would go over to the *Shark* that morning and see them; if he liked the look of them, he would make John an offer.

After breakfast the three men started off in the dinghy. They took Julep to the pier where he was able to scramble up to the level of the railway track and from thence start on his journey to the town. John then sculled in the direction of the *Shark*, Cray sitting in the stern and steering.

Half a dozen skins were pulled out and looked at in a great deal less time than the bargainers of yesterday had taken to the consideration of one.

"I don't know in the least what they are worth," said Cray. "They look fairly good and may have value; on the other hand they may be quite valueless. You see I never thought I should come to buy stingaree skins. They may be worth five pounds each or more. I don't know. I'll make you a sporting offer if you like, and I don't suppose you'll get more from any one here. What did they offer you?"

"Ten pounds, I think."

"Well, I'll give you fifty. I'm sure they ought to be worth that."

"All right, if that's not too much," said John delighted at having succeeded where Pomfrey had failed. But he took little credit to himself, for how different was Cray from Pomfrey's customers. If this was trade, then it was not so bad after all, and far different from yesterday's bargainings.

They started back towards *The Venture* both pleased with themselves and with each other. About half-way, Cray gave the order to easy with the oars and let the boat drift for a while.

"If you are looking for a job," he said, "will you come with me on *The Venture*? You'd have to help Julep with his work, learn to cook, do any odd work that needed doing, and sail the boat when you were told to. I'll pay you a pound a week, which is rather less than you get on the sheep runs or the gold fields; but then the work you will have to do will not be very hard, at any rate for a while."

John flushed with excitement. "Are you going up north?" he said.

"Yes."

This was his dream come true, better than he could have hoped. "Yes, I'd come for nothing," his impulsiveness carried him away.

Cray smiled indulgently, though he liked the spirit. "No, I shall pay you, and that fifty pounds — it will want looking after. And I shall look after you a bit while you are with me, until you've learnt something of life and money. You had better bank it and start an account.



THE PORT OF KAIMERA 61

I'll show you how that's done," he smiled. "You will be glad of the money perhaps when the trip's over. Now we'll go back to the boat to fetch my cheque-book and my wife, then you can help us find the way up the river to the town."

Cray rather enjoyed talking to John, as if he were a child. The position of patron set him high in his own estimation, he could feel the warm radiations of the youth's growing devotion. As for John, his imagination was captured. This man, with his gentle and sharp-cut manners (so unlike his father), his eagerness for events, his self-confidence, his generosity, and above all his power of lifting life to the plane of a grand adventure, touched the pulse of a new existence making glorious the hope of the future. He would go to the ends of the world, if so bidden, and ask no reward. The light in the sunlit waves was eloquent with happiness, and when Cray gave the signal he struck them with his oars, making the dinghy leap forward as if infected by the fervour of his faith.



CHAPTER III

THE SEABOARD

I

ARTHUR CRAY was the son of a London merchant. At the whim of his father he had been educated in France and Italy, where he had travelled with tutors. At nineteen he had taken a scholarship in Physics at Cambridge. At the University he had abandoned science and had taken a First Class in Classics. From Classics he went on to Moral Sciences and from Moral Sciences to Psychology. This latter study had taken him back to Paris, where for some time he assumed the dress and habits of a French savant. Suddenly tired of the life, he had cruised in the Mediterranean, had visited the coast of Africa and had risked his life in more than one encounter with the wild Bedouin tribes. On returning to Paris he met Caroline Vertaud.

Caroline was the daughter of a French Protestant and an English mother. She had been educated in England and this was her first year in Paris. Cray fell romantically in love with her, and, with the brilliance of his many accomplishments, carried her off her feet. After they were married, he took her to the Pacific. In Tahiti they had stayed more than a year, then back to Paris and later to London. They had now been married for seven years, and, although Cray had taken a house near Fontainebleau, they had never settled. His restless genius,

eager for knowledge and adventure, had urged him to travel.

With power and sufficient self-control to hold life in his grasp, he had regarded it as an experiment whose proof lay through sense and brain to spirit. Throughout their years of wandering Mrs. Cray had followed him with a passive obedience. Her life, devoid of any material anchorage and unable to keep pace with her husband's hurrying imagination, had come to move about its own axis. In the contemplation of the ever-changing beauty of existence she found a cool and spiritual satisfaction. Her husband, in the fervour of his conception of life, had simply not recognized the ordinary needs of a woman's existence, and Caroline, under the influence of his enthusiasm, had found pleasure in renunciation and a passive happiness in accepting the accidental joys of adventure.

Tom Julep first met Cray in Bristol. He was then in charge of a small ketch plying between Bristol and Cherbourg. They had exchanged greetings on the quay near Bridge Street and the two men had been attracted to each other by their dissimilarities. Then, some months later, they had met again by the river-side in Paris. At this time Cray was planning the cruise round the north coast of Australia. He told Julep of his scheme, which was projected chiefly for the sake of new adventure, but which contained prospects, which, besides offering danger and enterprise, suggested the possibility of large profits. They had discussed these possibilities, had come to a business understanding, and subsequently Julep had travelled out to join *The Venture* at Perth. The first four hundred miles of the journey had passed

uneventfully. They had put in at Kaimera to buy stores sufficient to last them for the eight or twelve months that they hoped to be away.

The three days they were in port, Cray spent mostly in Kaimera making his purchases and talking to any one who could give information about the coast northward. The skins he brought to the pier and addressed to his agent in Perth. He kept John with him, taking an evident pleasure in showing the boy how things should be done. He banked the £50 in John's name, and bought him an outfit as a present, including a shot-gun and a store of cartridges.

After the first visit, Mrs. Cray did not go again to the town, but walked by herself on Babbage Island. She took with her her paint-box and a camp-stool, seeming happy in solitude. Julep, whenever he was free, spent his time on shore following his own ends, and not till the day before they started did John see anything of him; then together they had the slow task of tacking down the estuary against a head-wind in a shallow-draught ship's-boat which Cray had hired to carry out his store of provisions.

That evening they all slept aboard; as the night was hot they slept on deck, Cray and Mrs. Cray in hammocks near the poop and Julep and John forward on the bare boards. *The Venture* stirred very gently to the movement of the waves, and John, as he gazed up through the clear night air, watched the mast-head tracing patterns among the stars. The water against the hull sounded with a soft plashing that had in it the friendliness of intimacy. Once he raised himself to look at the rippling surface, then lay back upon the deck contented.

In the depths of the night above him there was room for all aspiration, and in the glitter of the stars a thousand kindling hopes.

II

Early the next morning the south-west wind came in light puffs over the Indian Ocean. The crew of *The Venture* were astir before sunrise, anchor was lifted, the sails flapped for a moment then steadied to the wind, the water murmured about the bows, and *The Venture*, like a white sea-bird, headed north-westward for the open. The lights of early morning in grey and mauve forgot slowly their bashfulness and the sun, yet hidden by the earth, lit with a line of crimson the thin mist clouds that hung above the land. The sea was green and translucent. In distant streaks of smooth surface it was olive alternating with yellow, but nearer, in the hollows of waves could be discerned a fleeting pinkness, that flashed from transparency to disappear in emerald caps. Overhead the sky flushed a deeper pink as the sun rose.

The wind grew stronger as the day lengthened, the water under the bows babbled more loudly, and the cutter leant over, dipping her starboard bulwark as she cut the waves. Behind her a wake of tumbling water twisted the reflections of the sun in eddies and swirling pools.

By midday both sky and sea had taken on a deep blue. The waves, now full of indigo and cobalt, broke sometimes to white crests, which in turn subsided to clusters of clear bubbles scattering and dipping over the film of their undulations. On the cutter the deck became so hot that water had to be sluiced over it to prevent the feet

of the men from being burnt. Now and then an old shell-back turtle rose to the surface and looked with a serious eye at *The Venture* as she sped past. Often the sharp fins of sharks appeared in a long line, sometimes a school of porpoises came chasing one after another, regardless of everything in their swift career.

Then, later, as the sun sloped toward the western ocean, the intensity of the blue waters subsided and the thin red glare of a tropical evening pervaded the sky. The waves caught and cooled the reflections, tempering the crimson of sunset with greens and amethyst. As the wind dropped, they lost their white caps, while the liquid colours, blending and shifting in undulations, exchanged their bright tints for the opaque greys and mauves of twilight.

On board the cutter, life very easily adapted itself to the habit of the encompassing elements. Each individual formed a distinctive appreciation of the sea-life; in return the sea touched each personality with something of its pervading nature. The necessary duties of sailing the boat and preparing food became in themselves adequate and sufficient actions. The speaking of words became a freedom not to be lavishly wasted; in the intervals of silence was room for self-sufficiency and quiet happiness.

The first evening they anchored in a small sheltered bay near Maund's Landing, and the next morning made a more northerly course, still hugging the land. For three days they sailed northwards, the south-west wind holding good. When they had rounded the north-west cape they steered four points westward, keeping the land close on their right.

Sometimes in the evenings Cray would go ashore and

take John with him. They had their guns and would shoot wallabies and kangaroos for fresh meat. On these occasions Cray would make the boy talk of his past life, and their friendship developed. It was a curious relationship. John on his side was full of admiration for the polished product of the elder man's experience. He had devotion also, and with it a shy desire to learn. Cray, conscious of John's emotions, was pleased with them and pleased with himself for being the fount of their inspiration. He liked the youth, and especially his fresh simplicity. Too intelligent to assume superiority for his knowledge, he chose a friendly equality of manner, trusting to John's honesty to observe the just quality of their relationship. In this trust he was justified, and their friendship grew.

During the voyage northward all the ship's company seemed united in an easy intimacy. Cray's clear-edged leadership gave vigour and confidence, while Julep's friendly good nature received an additional quality from the sensual leer that usually accompanied it. He took a perverse pleasure in gently ridiculing Cray's idealism and John's ignorance. The two men liked each other for their opposite qualities and liked the youth, both for himself and for the way in which he drew out the character of the other. They admired also his great efficiency in fishing with spear or hook, in shooting, sailing and the like.

Mrs. Cray in her passive and watchful attitude towards life seemed content to find satisfaction in appreciating the qualities of the others. Her life in no way mingled with that of the men; she remained outside, a spectator living in a world of her own thoughts. Her relationship

with her husband did not display itself. She was friendly and kind but by no means under his sway, as were the two men. Perhaps in the course of seven years his brilliant egoism had tired her, or perhaps she found in her own thoughts a more congenial interpretation of life.

After *The Venture* had left behind the North-West Cape, many islands were sighted. Among these islands they cruised to and fro for some days. Cray seemed much interested, especially in the atolls and the long fringing reefs. Sometimes he spent whole days ashore and took Julep with him. John was sorry that he was not asked on these expeditions, especially as he believed they were looking for something about which he knew nothing, and was curious.

He had spoken very little to Mrs. Cray and was shy of talking to her now that they were left alone. She didn't seem anxious either to talk to him, and beyond some friendly greeting or question she was silent. Usually she would sit aft near the companion-way either painting or reading one of the numerous books that she had brought on board. John would go ashore and lie lazily in the grass watching the sand insects or would roam the beach, looking for shells. His orders were not to go far from the boat.

One evening when he was squatting in the bows of *The Venture* catching snapper with hook and line at the turn of the tide, Mrs. Cray walked forward and stood watching his occupation. He had already four shining fish upon the deck; each weighed fourteen pounds or more, and he was just playing a fifth. The bright sides of the fish caught the sunlight, the crimson and silver scales reflecting it like jewels.

"Why do you catch so many?" said Mrs. Cray, "we can never eat all those."

"It's fun catching them," said John with a hasty glance up.

"You don't want all those."

"No," admitted John, landing the fifth.

"What colour he has, and what a fight he makes for life. Put him back, you don't want him."

"Very well." He pulled out the hook and let the fish slide through his hands into the sea. It lay for a time on its side exhausted, the gills under the silver plate of the operculum making great play. While they watched, the fish righted itself, then with a suddenly realized freedom dived deep through the clear water.

"See how glad he is to live," she said; then looking at those on the deck. "Their beauty soon fades when they are dead."

Peering down through the water John saw two large jelly-fish. Their transparent flesh was tinted a pale blue, and their streaming tentacles swayed in the currents. "Do you see those jelly-fish?" he said, feeling a little embarrassed and glad to speak.

"Yes, I watched others like them this morning, numbers of them passed the boat."

"They look nice, don't they?" said John, then added, as though ashamed of praising them, "though they are no good to eat, and they sting awfully when one swims."

Mrs. Cray looked through the clear waters with eyes full of appreciation. The fragile texture and pale colour of the sea creatures evidently pleased her. "They have such a beautiful name," she said. "They are called Medusæ."

John repeated the word as though tasting about it a whimsical quality, then asked, "Are some words better than others?"

"Yes, don't you think they are?" He hadn't ever thought about it, but he registered the fact for further consideration. "Now I want you to paddle me to the shore," Mrs. Cray went on. "The other two are having all the fun. I like the look of this island and want to climb the hill over there and see from the top of it."

John was surprised, suddenly very pleased. Mrs. Cray had spoken very little to him and consequently he had regarded her with curiosity and a certain mixture of antagonism; now, as he looked at her slim figure standing by the mast, he realized that she was beautiful and interesting. If some words were better than others, then this woman was better and different from anything he had imagined. With this new-sprung interest the thought came that perhaps she had felt lonely that day.

When he pulled up the dinghy to the side of the cutter, he had an impulse to help her in but checked it, feeling it to be absurd. When she put out her hand for his support he was pleased. As he sat opposite to her pulling at the sculls he looked, as bravely as he dared, at the soft and delicate lines of her face. He felt a consciousness of himself, was glad that he was young and strong, and that the exercise of sculling showed off the muscles of his brown arms. When they reached the shore, they started to walk inland, and John discovered that Mrs. Cray had the power, though indeed she had spoken very little, of raising this tiny expedition to the level of an adventure. He felt it indeed to be an exciting adventure. Into the smallest incidents Mrs. Cray

was able to read a pleased significance. She laughed at trifles, and, at the same time as she endowed them with humour and meaning, extracted from them those very qualities. To John's newly awakened imagination the incidents of their progress shone, each isolated and perfect, and he learnt how that in the simplest things joy can be discovered.

When they reached the hill-top, which was little more than a sand-dune, they could see inland towards distant tree-clumps and high rocks. In front of them was a wide stretch of blown sand which spread out on either side in a long crescent, following the edge of the fringing reef. It looked too far to walk to the high land in the centre, so they sat down where they were, and Mrs. Cray began to make rough drawings in a sketch-book. John sprawled on the sand chewing a grass blade. At first she made him talk about Kanna Island, his father and mother, and the life they lived together. He was glad to speak of them, feeling her sympathy. Once started he talked on, eager to tell his experience, his knowledge of wild life and wild things, of the island mice that carried their young in a little pouch, of the bandicoots whose skin was so tender that it tore when you caught them unless you were very careful, of the grasshoppers that the bandicoots eat and that imitated twigs in self-protection, and of the sand-living insects. These last were round about them in the sunshine, working at their various tasks. Mrs. Cray put down her drawing to watch the work of the burrowing sand-wasps while he told her of their habits.

Two hours went by very quickly. John talked all the time, while Mrs. Cray listened and asked occasional

questions. Then she remembered that they must go back and prepare supper before the others returned. On their way back to the shore John plucked a large seed-head of a plant resembling a giant dandelion. He held it up for her to see the perfect globe of its delicate structure.

"When I was a child," she said, "we used to tell the time with seeds like that."

"How?"

"By blowing them. If you blow five times to send the seeds all flying, then it's five o'clock."

"But not really?"

"No, not really, it's just a child's game. We liked to see each little seed floating in the wind."

He gave a puff and a cloud of tiny white parachutes went flying, then he dropped the stem, not deigning to play a child's game with those that still clung to the central disk. Mrs. Cray watched the seeds floating in eddies of air. Even this small incident she seemed to rescue from insignificance. The dandelion-head and the separate flying seeds took rank with the medusæ as things of beauty. She had endowed them with something of her own grace, or rather some quality possessed in common by them both had become evident through her joy in them.

John wondered what she had been like as a child, who were her companions, and where had she lived, but he did not question her, the idea of that was too new.

When in the evening Cray and Julep returned to *The Venture* Mrs. Cray made no allusion to her visit to the land, and John, following her lead, said nothing. That night he thought about her as he lay on deck under the stars. Why had she said nothing, when his instinct had

been to tell Cray of their expedition? The next day he watched her, hoping that she would talk to him again, but the loveliness and pleasure of yesterday had vanished. She appeared as on the early days of the voyage, self-contained and silent. He felt indeed humiliated that she seemed hardly to recognize his existence.

III

For a week they had been among the islands, but the next morning Cray gave the order that they should continue their course north-westward. He told them he was leaving the land and did not expect again to strike it for four days. The south-west wind which holds for months in that region bowled them along over the waves. They had the spinnaker set and *The Venture* looked like a white moth that in summer-time is caught on the surface of a pond, carried along by the breeze. By night the men kept watch four hours at a time, but during the day they had no fixed rule, Mrs. Cray taking her turn at the helm. The time went very lazily, the weather was hot and cloudless. They were sailing now between latitudes 21 and 16 south, and were daily going farther north. At midday they would sit close under the shadow of the sails and be very glad when the sun sank westward. During these days they talked a good deal, coming to know one another in the way that only close companionship can teach man to know man. Cray and Julep told of former expeditions, while John listened eager to hear of other lands and seas. Mrs. Cray listened also, speaking very little, though she was always ready to pay tribute to a good story. Julep she liked, though she kept him at very respectful distance, and was unfeignedly amused by his good-natured

jibes at men and women. Cray talked with his usual vivacity and intense manner, though sometimes, when he was telling stories that she had heard before, it was just perceptible that she was a little bored. Now that John observed her with a personal interest he could see that she remained outside and apart from the life of the men. Often she would be away by herself reading in the cabin while they sat together and talked. This was as it had been from the first days north of Kaimera, but he felt that things were not quite as they then were. He himself had changed, and since their walk together felt himself to be as her secret ally.

On the evening of the fourth day they sighted land to the westward. As they drew near they saw that there was a small white settlement with a pier for loading wool to the trading steamers. In a small bay to the north of the settlement was a native camp. Cray passed the pier and dropped anchor opposite to the camp. The natives stood in rows along the beach full of curiosity concerning the new arrival.

The next day Cray asked John to come ashore with him. He said he wanted to talk to the natives and to see what sort of fellows they were. As soon as they reached the land two or three natives came running to them and began at once to ask for tobacco in pidgin-English. Cray took no notice of these importunities beyond looking at the men with a kind of contemptuous resentment. They followed him, rather abashed but still clamorous. By the time the white men had reached the camp they were surrounded by an eager crowd, anxious in their demands for tobacco, pipes, handkerchiefs and other of the desired products of civilization. One old man who was evidently of high

standing, threatened to become troublesome. He violently gesticulated, demanding that his requests should at once be gratified. Cray simply looked past him as if he did not exist, then noticing a man who was still sitting by one of the fires, he went up to him and asked with slowness and deliberation, noting each answer as though it were a fact of interest and importance, what was the name of the tribe, of the place, his own name and names of his wives, his father and mother. Very soon the others ceased their demands and listened interested. The old man of high standing became anxious to volunteer information. He was envious of Cray's interest in the other man. Again he was ignored. There was now no thought of begging; they were all silent and interested. The man whom Cray had first spoken to, and who now was standing up, was questioned further. He was delighted at the attention paid him, doing his best to please by his answers. This became too much for the old chief, who positively implored to be heard. Cray now relented a little, telling him that he wished to see some of their boomerangs, their spears, their throwing-sticks and shields. A collection was soon displayed, and this simple-minded and primitive people offered in reward for his condescending notice nearly everything that they had in their camp, this for the simple reason that he had taken the trouble to despise them and had shown his contempt. After refusing the many gifts which they offered he distributed some sticks of tobacco brought for that purpose. These were much appreciated, and the subdued natives put out their brown delicate-looking hands not daring to ask.

For some hours Cray stayed in the camp talking with the natives, John remaining with him full of admiration

for the way he asserted his control. He asked about the seaboard northward and of the various tribes that inhabited the coast. There were wild fellows on the islands they told him, wicked fellows who killed every one who landed, both white and black. When he had learnt all that he needed, he took the old chief aside and asked to see the tribal magic-sticks that were kept in a sacred place. The old man was pleased at this special attention. He took them away into the bush a short distance and there unearthed some of the sticks and waninga of the tribe. By means of indirect flattery Cray persuaded him to bargain two of these precious carved sticks for a pipe and several whole pieces of tobacco. He gave the old fellow a red handkerchief thrown in to please him; they parted good friends, both satisfied with the transaction.

On the way back to the shore Cray was in high good spirits. "These little sticks," he said, "are of more value among wild natives than any amount of guns and revolvers. A wild man doesn't fear death you'll find, but he's afraid of magic, and sticks like this belonging to a foreign tribe have the power to kill through the very fear of them."

John listened, full of wonder, as yet only half understanding. "Now come with me," Cray continued with a growing excitement showing through his quiet manner. "I want to look at the shore along here; and keep your eyes open for cover where two men could hide and be hidden even from the eyes of a black fellow, which don't miss much." He led the way through the thick scrub which grew along the edge of the sand-dunes, then pausing and pointing to a dark-leaved clump of acacia that grew in a hollow, "Could you crawl through that do you think, and jump out again quick at the word of command?"

"Yes, I think so," said John, looking doubtfully at the long thorns.

"You'll get a bit scratched, but that's all in the day's work. Crawl in and let's have a look at you."

John obeyed.

"Further in," insisted Cray, "I can still see a foot. Now turn round — that's all right. Is there room for Julep there?"

"Yes, but he won't like the thorns."

"Now crawl out again carefully so as not to break any of them," Cray laughed.

John was now thoroughly curious and excited; he asked what was going to happen. Cray only smiled indulgently, suggesting that it was time to get back for lunch on board.

IV

The next morning Cray set off with Julep for the mainland. John, who felt very much dissatisfied at not being taken, was left behind with Mrs. Cray. Half the night he had lain awake wondering what was afoot. Something certainly was going to happen, and he was afraid that he should miss the excitement. He was more than disappointed, he was cross and annoyed, feeling that he didn't care even to go ashore and fish and shoot by himself. For the last five days Mrs. Cray had hardly spoken to him; now he rather purposely avoided her. He sat by the forecastle disconsolate, mending some of his fishing tackle. After a while he heard his name called.

"Yes," he answered, trying to seem indifferent.

"I am going ashore, will you carry some of my things for me?"

He went aft to pull up the dinghy. Mrs. Cray, with

her sketching-bag in her hand, was on the steps between the cabin and the deck. John noticed at once that she looked happy and full of a quiet gaiety. This was just as she had been on their expedition together, quite different from her suppressed character of the last few days.

"There are trees over there, do you see?" she said. "I haven't seen trees since I left Perth. I shall take my painting things and a stool. You will carry it for me? And let us take some lunch too!"

She looked so pleased and fresh that John's annoyance all disappeared. The spirit of adventure which she could put into trifles became at that moment greater than the mystery of Cray's undivulged plans. By the time that they were in the dinghy John was glad that he had been left behind. When they reached the shore they walked up the bed of a small stream which trickled through the growth of grasses and flowering herbs. A few bushes grew by the water's side; further inland the pale stems of white gum trees appeared in scattered groups. It was too hot to walk far, so they climbed the hill a little way and Mrs. Cray sat down under the shadow of wide branches. She began to make drawings of the tiny creeping sundews and the delicate blue orchids that grew richly among the grass. John watched her pencil and the play of her hand, interested by her power to trace on paper the image of live plants.

In the valley about a mile distant they could see the native camp, where the white figures of Cray and Julep could be discerned. As to Cray's purpose, they both felt curiosity, though they did not speak of this. Mrs. Cray questioned about John's visit to the camp yesterday, asking for his impressions. He had as yet little interest in the

natives; not understanding them he thought they were ugly and dirty, contemptible in their begging and in their subsequent desire to please. He told how Cray had mastered them, how he had refused the proffered presents, and how that friendly relations had been ultimately established. In all this he spoke his praise from his heart, wishing that they might together commend the qualities he admired.

"Yes, my husband is very good with natives," said Mrs. Cray. "They feel his intelligence and his sympathy. He is extraordinarily imaginative in some things; he understands their point of view."

"Have you seen many black-fellows before you came here?"

"Yes, we lived in a native village in Tahiti quite by ourselves for six months."

"Did you like them?"

"Oh yes." Her eyes showed the pleasure of recollections. "The Tahitians are the most beautiful people with strong supple bodies, that is where they are in the country away from the towns, and they are so happy and simple, much nicer than white people."

"Nicer than white people?" he questioned.

"Yes, they are more happy. They know what contentment is, and haven't invented so much pain for themselves. They wear very few clothes, and that's a good thing, keeping them clean and sweet in the wind, the sun and the rain. People in Europe are always dressed too much and live too much indoors."

John was silent, trying to digest this criticism of the whites. It seemed strange that black men, even the best of them, should be considered better than people of his

own colour. After a pause he said, "Tell me about Europe."

Mrs. Cray smiled at so wide a question. "No, I can't tell you all that, I know too little myself. Perhaps one day you may go there, but don't be in a hurry; life out here is wider and has more leisure. Europe has taken thousands of years to make; it is built up of laws and restrictions, and only when one knows the best of it from inside is it possible to outgrow its restraint and to learn very slowly some of its freedom."

This answer was unsatisfying; he did not understand; it seemed as if she were trying to avoid his question. Remembering his father's abuse of the mainland and all the life of men and cities, he wished for more knowledge.

"My father came from England before he lived in the towns — in Perth and Kaimera. He told me that he hated it all." John was embarrassed by speaking about his father in this relation, but he wanted so much to know more. He spoke with a simple earnestness, feeling that by confessing his father's beliefs he was laying open part of his own life. "He said that there was no place on the mainland for himself, or for my mother, and that I should only learn unhappiness. He told me to go back to the island when I had found out how bad and rotten it all was."

"You say he never went to the mainland, nor your mother either?"

"No."

Mrs. Cray had put down her pencil and was watching the boy with interest. After a short pause she said: "There *are* some who would be glad to get away from

it all. There must have been a very strong reason."

"There was, but that I can't tell you. Though that was not all. He never wanted to go back anyhow. I know nothing about anything," John complained, "but I don't believe it's as bad as he made out."

"No, it's not all bad," Mrs. Cray smiled, "but a great deal depends on how you learn it. In a way you are lucky to start fresh with everything before you unspoiled. That's what my husband said when you swam out that first day at Kaimera and had breakfast with us. It will all come in its turn, don't be in a hurry. This journey north will teach you something before you are let loose on the cities."

While she had been speaking the last few words John's attention had veered from what she was saying to her herself. Quite of a sudden he had seen her personality as an object of grace, something to be revered and admired. A feeling of gratitude filled him, that this woman, a creature from another world as she seemed, should be talking to him with such seriousness and intimacy. That in itself was wonderful, but not so wonderful as the picture that he now had of her gentle personality, alone amid the untamed landscape. The stem of the white-barked gum tree at her back had a grace similar to her own, and the thin flat leaves that spread in fans from its delicate branches cast a dappled tracery of shadow and sunlight upon her face and blouse. There was something young in her, younger than himself; both body and spirit had the quality of a flower new sprung from a kind soil.

Looking up, she met his glance and looked away again; then she picked up her pencil and continued her drawing. John, feeling her slight embarrassment, also looked away,

and gazed at the blue distance of the hills, then, feeling a pleasure in the growing silence between them, he looked up into the branches of the tree. As the stem tapered upwards it became less pale than the main trunk, being tinted with blues and mauves. His eyes followed the slender growth and were suddenly arrested by what, at the first glance, looked like a large and irregular swelling; at the next he saw that it was a huge lizard that clung close against the stem. For a moment he lay still, surprised at its size. It was bigger than anything he had ever seen on Kanna Island, being at least five feet long; then he scrambled up. "Look at that enormous lizard," he called.

Mrs. Cray stood up for a better view, and they looked for the first time on one of the giant iguanas of the North-West. The lizard remained quite still and unconcerned, allowing them to admire his green and bronze sides, his flat broad head and wakeful, blinking eyes. After a while John threw a stick to make him move. In an instant he ran out along a bough and half jumped, half fell into the next tree. There was a great scatter of dry bark amid the rasping sweeps of his tail, and he was gone. They followed but could find nothing of him; big as he was, he had disappeared, though they knew he was not far away watching them, concealed by his protective colouring. John told of other smaller lizards on Kanna Island, of the bush-devils who are covered with spines and who drink through their skins, of the little sand-lizards with tiny legs and a long body that disappear as a flash into loose sand, and of the geckos that live under loose bark. He stripped bark from the nearest tree and found several of these latter. Mrs. Cray took the

slow-moving little creatures in her hands. She was pleased at the round cup-like toes that clung to her fingers. She, in turn, told of the heath-lizards of England and of the handsome green fellows that live at Fontainebleau. For some time they walked on, looking for other live things, discovering under bark monstrous spiders and long-legged fluffy centipedes, as well as creatures which neither of them could name. At lunch time they went back to the shade of the eucalyptus clump where they had left the camp-stool and the sketching things. In the easy talk over their morning's adventures, John was happy with a new and unclouded happiness. This happiness, which sprang from a fuller and more lively appreciation of everything in life, possessed him, making his heart feel light and his body the airy flame of his spirit. In the afternoon when they walked back towards the shore he was grave and self-contained; with no words could he express the joy he felt in their day's companionship. He was contented to breathe in silence the cool breeze from the sea, glad that he was alive.

v

Mrs. Cray and John were back in *The Venture* in good time to prepare supper, but he had not been at work long when Julep's whistle sounded from the beach as a call for the dinghy. John pulled across to fetch them. He saw that Cray was in good spirits. As he stepped from the dinghy to the deck he told John to hurry on with a cold supper as he had things to say to them all, and they would have to go ashore again that evening. John's interest in adventure kindled in the presence of Cray's keen person-

ality, soon blazing to excitement. He tried to find out from Julep what was to happen, but Julep would say nothing beyond letting drop tantalizing hints.

After the meal Cray drew back chairs for himself and his wife on to the poop, while Julep and John seated themselves on the cabin roof. After a short pause that their attentions might be fixed, he began to speak of the venture which months ago he and Julep had hatched in Paris.

With his incisive, alert manner he went straight to the heart of his subject. "The two boats that we saw yesterday were pearling luggers from Broom. This is the beginning of the season of their best work. You'll have heard that there's a big industry in shell at Broom, and the men who run it are very particular whom they let in. They have a ring, with which any outsider finds it difficult to compete."

"Distinctly unhealthy," broke in Julep; "a man wouldn't live a month if he tried it, that is if he had any prospect of success. I was there a matter of eight years ago, and I know."

Cray went on, regardless of the interruption. "The law is that no black or yellow man shall be employed on the mainland. But the ring of pearlers at Broom is so strong that an exception is made. They have Japanese divers, and pay a good price." He made a slight pause, then continued: "My scheme is to cut out the regular traders and take some of the pearls. Up north-west from here there are numberless islands, some unchartered; and some have blacks on them, really wild fellows, not like the half-tame ones in the camp yonder. White men have

never been near them. They only show themselves with spears and boomerangs, ready to fight."

"I'm going to make friends with these wild men and make them work for me; I shall pay them in tobacco and presents, things they value more than money. The difficulty lies at the start . . . getting into touch. . . . After that all will be easy." He spoke now directly to John.

"You understand there will be danger, and it's illegal. Against us there is the law, the natives, and, what is perhaps most dangerous of all, the people in the regular trade. Fortunately they have no suspicion. Our first difficulty will be the natives. For the natives we must have an interpreter who can talk and from whom I can learn something of the language."

Mrs. Cray's interest was held, she knew vaguely the scheme, though the details were new to her. Her husband went on:

"Nothing on earth, but force, could compel one of those fellows on shore to go up north among the wild tribes. They would be like lambs among wolves, and they know it. All the same, I must take one with me," he added with a smile. His intense manner now relaxed, and he spoke as if reviewing with an easy mind the details of his plan. "There is a man in the camp, whom I talked with yesterday and again this morning, called Teacoopoo. He is an intelligent little fellow, strong and hardy looking. He is the man I shall take with me. I am going ashore in about half an hour, and John will bring back the dinghy. At six o'clock I want you two," nodding to Julep and John, "to go ashore a quarter of a mile north of the place where the thick clump of acacias is. You must

pull the dinghy up and hide it in the bushes. Then go and hide, both of you, at the place I pointed out to John yesterday. You must be there by six, and out of sight. At half-past I shall come, bringing with me Teacoopoo." He laughed, partly amused at his own dramatic mode of talking and partly at the pleasant picture of his device. "There may be two of them," he added, "but I shall try and bring only one. When I call you are to jump out of that bush like knives. I shall have him close, and you will be able to grab his legs. Bring a gag with you, Julep; the great thing is not to let him shout. Don't hurt him if you can help. Black fellows if they are away from their tribe die easily if they are a little out of sorts. Take cord to tie him up with. We'll get him into the dinghy, on board and out to sea before they know he's missing. Is that all clear?" he asked, looking straight at John.

Julep screwed up his face in a kindly grin and answered for him. "Yes John's all right, he's just bursting to tackle our friend Tea-cup."

They all laughed at the nickname, and Mrs. Cray remarked with compassion, "Poor Tea-cup," then to her husband, "You'll take him back to his tribe when we return, and not let him be hurt?"

"Of course," said Cray, "he will be as safe as any of us, safer. Three or four months away from his tribe won't do him any harm. In a day or two he will be quite happy, and when I bring him back I'll give him more presents than black boy ever dreamed of. You know Upiko who was with us, and how he cried when we left — well, this fellow will be the same." For a while he went on talking, pleased at recollections, telling of adventures in Tahiti, of the faithful Upiko and his fellow-tribesmen. When Cray

was in this mood he carried everything before him, like a fresh breeze over a sunny sea. By the time John had paddled him across to the beach he was thoroughly infected with the spirit, and as he watched him walk away along towards the native camp he had no doubts as to the success of the enterprise.

At the appointed time John and Julep reached the beach. They hid the dinghy in thick bushes, and soon afterwards crawled into their own hiding-place. Julep swore a good deal at the thorns, and laughingly made John go first to smooth them the right way, as he put it. Once inside, he remarked that the ruddy things would now all be pointing the wrong way when they came to get out. As they squatted there together at such close quarters John felt the physical charm of his companion's easy-going strength. There was something so firm and unyielding in Julep and so suggestive of kindly good nature that it was not difficult to believe the truth of the tales he told of his successful encounters with women. He began now to speak about the black girls that he had seen at the camp, saying that he wished Cray was not in so damned a hurry to be off, and that two of the younger ones were not so bad, to his thinking. He went on to complain in coarse phrases how that it was all very well for Cray, who had his wife with him, but that he hadn't seen a woman since he left Kaimera. The brutality of his meaning struck John like a blow; he felt as if he had been hit in an unexpected and tender place. Besides being hurt, he was angry. Julep had no right to talk about Mrs. Cray in that way. He had no right to speak of others from his point of view. It was a hateful point of view John thought. He didn't say anything, though he felt indig-

nant — indignant that he had been made to see something that he had not wished to think about. He felt a passionate resentment against marriage and married people.

It was now late twilight, and for some minutes they waited in silence. The sound of Cray's voice warned them for action. Julep handed the gag to John. "I'll grab his legs and bring him down," he whispered, "you sh-shove this in his mouth." The voices came nearer, and Cray and Teacoopoo halted opposite the bush; then Cray, without raising his voice, but still speaking as though in conversation, gave the order.

In a moment, regardless of all thorns, they sprang from their ambush. The unfortunate Teacoopoo gave one squawk of terror as he came to the ground. John made a bad shot for his mouth and nearly got bitten. Julep panted in a fierce whisper, "Stop his b ——— mouth," then in the next moment Teacoopoo was spluttering into the gag, while Julep's weight pinned him to the earth.

Cray stood by, calmly watching. "That's right," he said. "Now let me have the cord." They tied up their capture by his legs, his wrists, and his thumbs, and soon had him on board the dinghy. From the camp there came no sound. All had gone well.

So soon as they reached *The Venture* they hoisted sail and the light evening wind carried them out to sea. Once they were out of sight of land, Cray, who all the while had been trying to put Teacoopoo at his ease and allay his terrors by assurances that he would soon return to his own people, untied his bonds. The black fellow was a little consoled and not so terrified as at first. Before long, however, he became very sick. When at length they all had to turn in he was tied to the anchor up in the bows for fear

that in his convulsions he might fall overboard. John took the helm for the first watch. His thoughts were in tumult and troubled. He felt disappointed in the whole adventure, not because he was particularly sorry for poor Teacup, but oh! he was restless, and the boat was small. He thought of Cray and Mrs. Cray. Yesterday's expedition seemed remote, not to be regained. Then he thought of Julep and the black girls, and though the cool moonlight fell very gently upon the waves he discovered both in the undulating reflection of the water and in the night air a warm, inextinguishable pain.

VI

On the eastern shore of an uncharted, nameless island there is a wide bay. Outside the bay the coral reef runs north and south, enclosing the shallow water of a lagoon. The rocky hills of the island rise westward to high cliffs, covered here and there with tropical jungle. The foot hills fall away to open country, where grow luxuriant blue and green grasses. These reach down to the sand of the sea's edge. North of the bay a rocky promontory, a spur of the central ridge, affords protection from the north; behind it a creek runs inland.

After four days of cruising among the neighbouring islands *The Venture* skirted along the edge of the reef looking for a passage between the white coral rocks. Cray was pleased at the view of the long reef. For the last three days Cray had sailed from island to island and had found nothing that looked so good. He told John to dive in and examine the sides of the reef, also the floor of the lagoon. The shells that he brought up were the large pearl shells of the North-West, and Cray expressed him-

self satisfied. The look of the country inland was also to his liking. The island was large, with several streams of clear water running down from the rocks to be lost in a tangle of rich grasses. That it was inhabited he felt little doubt, for he had seen natives on smaller islands in the vicinity, also several on rafts, who had made quickly for the shore as *The Venture* approached. Anchor was dropped under the shelter of the northern promontory far enough from the shore to be out of range of spears and boomerangs. "I like this place," said Cray, "it's the best we've seen so far. I don't think we'll do better. As soon as we are friends with the natives, we'll have a camp on shore and put up tents. There is plenty of timber up on those hills, so we can cut down poles, and stretch a fly for sitting under." Smiling at the prospect, he turned to Julep, "Now, Julep, I want you to make some really nice cakes and some loaves of bread that we can take ashore as presents this afternoon. Not very big ones — we mustn't pamper them — but nice ones to make them interested."

Cray had rejected so many promising places that they were all glad he had at last settled to stay. They were pleased at the look of the island, also at the prospect of a camp on shore.

The short voyage northward had been accomplished by the end of the first day, the rest of the time had been spent in visiting various beaches, prospecting for beds of shell. After the first night Tea-cup had ceased to be sea-sick, and in the morning allowed himself to be consoled with hot food, tea and brandy. Mrs. Cray and Cray were very gentle with him. John and Julep, following their example, extended a friendly tolerance.

Cray spent much of his time forward in the bows learn-

ing to talk the native language. By the time that they reached the island Tea-cup was at his ease; and sometimes, when eating the good food of the white man, quite cheerful. He soon fell under the spell of Cray's influence, having for him an unlimited respect and already the seeds of a dog-like devotion. During the days of prospecting John and Julep had their time and thoughts much taken up with the work ashore and in the water, also in learning the difficult words of Tea-cup's language, which Cray insisted that they must acquire. Mrs. Cray kept as usual to her own thoughts, and John, instead of being resentful that she hardly noticed him, was pleased that she should keep to herself any trace of memories they shared together.

On the day of their arrival they kept watch for any sign of natives, but could see none, either on the wide sweep of the beach or further inland. In the afternoon Cray and John went ashore. They climbed to the summit of the high rocks of the promontory, there depositing their offering of cakes and bread. Julep watched from *The Venture*, with a rifle handy in case they should be attacked. His instructions were not to shoot unless absolutely necessary. That night they heard the bull-roarers¹ at first far off, then coming nearer. Soon there were half a dozen sounding from different quarters, so that they knew the island must be full of natives. Watch was kept through the night for fear that the boat might be attacked. At the sound of the bull-roarers drawing nearer Tea-cup was in a sweat of terror, swearing that the island was full of bad

¹ Bull-roarers are magic instruments: pieces of flat wood tied to a string which when swung round rapidly makes a moaning, sobbing sound, very suggestive of mystery and magic.

men who would eat them all. He went into the fore-castle, hoping to hide himself.

For the first four hours of the night Cray kept watch. This excitement and danger was far more what he had come for than the pearls or the riches they could give. The moaning sob of the bull-roarers filled him with an elation that carried him out of himself away into the night. The primitive men over there in the bush, fierce and un-controlled, he was going to conquer. Confident in his power, he hoped to make himself their benevolent despot. This island with its bays and headlands formed a perfect kingdom. Its savage inhabitants he would subdue by the gentle strength which he knew was in him.

The next two days no natives showed themselves, though it could be seen from the thin columns of smoke from their fires that they had come down to the lower slopes of the foot-hills. At night they came close to the shore, swinging their bull-roarers from the height of the promontory to frighten away the intruders. Each day Cray left upon the rocks presents of food which in the night the natives carried away. On the third day he took with him beads and pieces of looking-glass as well as food. As he was climbing the rocks he saw two naked figures squatting by some bushes. They had in their hands spears and throwing-sticks, and watched him intently. Without pausing he walked past, put down his presents at the usual place, then as he returned he called out in native language that he wished to talk, and had brought many presents. There was no response, and the two figures disappeared. "They are very shy as yet," he said to John, "but before long we shall make friends. I like them for being shy. It's their native good manners,

that many white people have forgotten." He looked intently at the waving grass. "At any rate we've raised their interest. They are all round us now. I can't see them, but I can feel that they are there: fifty of them at least." John could feel it also, and was a little uncomfortable. "White men," Cray continued, "would by this time have killed anything so strange as we are to these little fellows; but they are not frightened of us, they are only inquisitive. The savage is not a bad fellow when you come to know him, and if you treat him with respect he'll seldom let you down."

When they reached the shore Cray again shouted that he wished to talk; then they sat down for a while and waited. After a little a naked brown figure appeared beckoning that they should follow. He led them towards the centre of the island along a narrow path through thick, high grass. When they had gone a good half-mile, and were by this time quite hidden from *The Venture*, John began to feel uneasy. He remarked that it was a long way back to the boat.

"Yes, there's no going back now," Cray answered cheerfully. "They are all round us; can't you see the grass waving, and behind us too? The great thing is to show them we are not in the least afraid. If they thought we were afraid we shouldn't have two minutes to live. As it is we are perfectly all right."

Their guide led them further, till the path opened on a wide clearing which was trampled hard by many footmarks. At the far end twenty of the elder tribesmen were seated on the ground. Spears and shields lay close at their hands. As Cray appeared they looked up, uttering sharp, angry noises from their throats; some put out

hands for their weapons. Cray advanced to within about thirty paces, holding his head high and looking unconcernedly at the old men. Then to John's great surprise he sat down, telling John to do likewise. "They are uncertain of us," he said. "If we walked any nearer now they might kill us out of pure funk. Pretend not to notice them much, and sit quiet."

In the midst of all his excitement an overwhelming admiration for his leader beat in John's heart. His admiration grew still greater as Cray talked on, apparently quite at his ease, though excitement showed in the brilliance of his eyes. For twenty minutes or so they sat, talking to one another, while the natives watched, sometimes in silence, sometimes conversing among themselves. The men who had taken up weapons put them down. They were puzzled by the two white men. At last one of their number approached, making signs that they wished Cray to come nearer. Cray rose and walked to the centre of the half-circle which they made; then again he sat down.

The men in front of him were mostly the leaders of the tribe. They wore no clothes beyond a string of small bones round their waists and another round their foreheads. Some of the younger had a pearl shell hung round their necks. Their bodies were gashed with deep cuts on shoulders and abdomen, and twisted in their beards were little balls of hard clay. They were all silent now, sulky and distrustful. With a direct gaze Cray fixed his eyes upon one of the elder men, who for a while remained silent, uncomfortable under the unflinching stare, then dropping his eyes, barked out a salutation. Cray returned the recognition, and fixed

upon the next man. In turn he regarded each man, exacting from each a greeting as sign of respect. One man alone did not speak, though Cray continued to stare angrily at him. At length, pointing to his mouth and ears to show that he was deaf and dumb, he stood up in sign of respect, so as not to anger the stranger.

To the best of his power, with the few words at his command, Cray explained that he had come from a far country for the special purpose of speaking with these people, that he would now send for his interpreter and tell them of his wants. John was sent back to fetch Julep and Tea-cup. A native boy went with him to show the quickest way through the long grass.

Poor Tea-cup was terribly frightened at the idea of going ashore, and still more so when John and Julep hurried him along a narrow path leading to the heart of the country. By the time he reached Cray he was grey with fear, but soon recovered a little confidence in the presence of a leader who inspired so much respect. Cray now told the natives that he wished to be their friend, and had brought for them many presents. He also said that he had great magical powers, more potent than anything they possessed. He had magic sticks which he carried in his bag, and which would kill, if he were so minded, any one who wished him evil. At this news the natives gave ejaculations of wonder, fidgeting uncomfortably where they sat. Cray said he would show these sticks to the old men, but must first be sure that no women were present.¹ They assured him that they were on sacred ground where no women might approach. Cray

¹ In the wild Australian tribes women are not allowed to see any instruments pertaining to the higher forms of religion.

did not, however, wish to appear easily satisfied, but rather to test his power. He pointed to various bushes, bidding the old men look behind them and see whether no women were concealed. They went obedient to his command, although but a short hour ago they held power over his life. When they returned he showed the sticks with much display of sacred awe. Wah! Wah! Wah! Pff! Pff! Pff! gasped the natives in the intense excitement of their religious sympathy. Cray assured them that his magic would not be used against those who were his friends, and that his power was only exercised against his enemies and those who had evil thoughts. All day he stayed talking with the natives, questioning them singly and making rapid strides in the acquisition of their language. He took notes and made vocabularies of their words, and, to amuse them, made drawings of the things they described. He laid himself out to please, yet all the while made stronger his position of authority. In the afternoon the old men conducted him through the bush to their encampment, where the women and younger men were gathered. Here he divulged something of his plan of using their young men as divers. In return for their services he would extend his protection to the tribe, and also give presents of brightly coloured cloth, tobacco, pipes and beads. The natives received the suggestion without much enthusiasm; but by assurances that all would be easily settled when work was once started and by the distribution of other small presents they were kept in good humour. At the same time he made them feel that he was bestowing a privilege in allowing them to work for him. In the evening he returned to the cutter well satisfied with his progress.

The next day Cray was early on shore and before long he had a working agreement with the leading tribesmen. It was conceded that twenty of the younger men should work for him as divers. In return he should promise to use his magical powers for the benefit of the tribe, should help them against their enemies in the case of their being attacked, and should give, at his own discretion, presents to the chiefs and to the divers.

When all was arranged and friendly relations cemented with gifts from both sides, Cray's first concern was to build a good camp. Tents were brought up from the hold and pitched on the heights of the promontory where a breeze cooled the air and kept away the mosquitoes. Trees were cut down and poles erected, on which a double fly was stretched to afford shelter from the sun. The natives watched in admiration the making of so big a camp; their respect was increased as folding-tables and camp-beds were added to its magnificence. In all there were four tents; there was also a big double-fly twenty-four feet square and a small one for cooking under, where at night Tea-cup could sleep. Altogether an imposing camp commanding a good view of the long bay.

Their next work was to build heavy rafts that could be anchored beyond the reefs and from which the men could work. Baskets also had to be woven for shell collecting. A section of the beach to the southward was put aside for the sorting and examining. Here the fish could be left to open in the sun where the smell of their decomposing bodies would be far from the camp.

Two weeks of hard-worked preparations went by before they could start on the main issue. Then, when

at last the real diving began, it was John's task to show the black boys what shells to collect and what to reject. He was glad to have this task assigned to him, not envying Julep his work on the beach under the hot sun amidst the reek of decomposing fish.

VII

During the inception of the new industry Cray worked with indefatigable energy. On his initiative the success of the whole scheme depended. The natives had to be kept in good order and cheerful while the various branches of the trade were organized. First, there was the diving work from the rafts, the selection and discarding of shells, then the transport to the beach, the opening and cleaning and the search for pearls. For pearls of the right size and quality he offered special rewards of coloured cloth, or triangles of looking-glass, so that the natives should be keen in their search.

After the first day, when a definite routine was established, the white men were able to relax their energies and look with a thrill of satisfaction on the orderly progress of the industry. Soon one or other of them was able to take times off in which to explore the size and resources of the island. Cray made a rough map, naming, for his own satisfaction, some principal features. On these expeditions they at first took natives as guides, but before long the country in the neighbourhood of the camp became so familiar that John and Julep could go out with their guns in search of wallabies with no danger of being lost among the high grass. John found his way over to the western side, where there were high cliffs

with dead coral at their base, reminding him of Kanna Island. Here he would hunt for eggs of the sea-birds, and sometimes shoot the black oyster-catchers that flew piping from rock to rock. On his return to camp he would have to cross the deeply wooded hills of the central ridge and drop down to the broken country of the foot-hills, where the trees grew more sparsely, forming clump and groups, as in a park, amidst luxuriant grass and flowering herbs. It was in this region that one day to his great surprise he saw Mrs. Cray seated under some dark-leaved fig-trees, which grew on the summit of a small prominence. Never before had he seen her so far from the camp, and although he knew that she often walked by herself he was rather shocked to think of her being exposed and solitary among savages. He stood for a while watching her. She was reading a book, and was intent on her occupation. John had felt very curious about books, though he had spoken little of them, not liking to display his ignorance. Especially with Mrs. Cray had he preferred to speak of the things that he understood. He wondered how it was that she could spend so much time looking at white pages. He would like to know what interest she found there, and although he was shy of approaching her without an invitation, having a natural instinct against disturbing her solitude, he now pushed his way through the long grass. Mrs. Cray did not see him till he was quite near to her. When she looked up there was a pleased look of welcome making him feel glad of the happy chance of finding her alone.

"I didn't expect you out here so far from the camp," he said. "We don't know all the natives on the island

yet. I wouldn't trust them too much. You know there are others that come in boats that we haven't seen anything of."

Mrs. Cray smiled at the prudence of the protecting male in him. "Natives are never hurtful if you treat them right. It's all a matter of attitude. They know when one is afraid and distrustful, and that makes them show the same feelings."

This answer seemed so right that John could say no more on that head. "But then there are snakes," he objected.

"Oh, come!" Mrs. Cray laughed at him. "There are just as many snakes near the camp as there are here. I'm not going to be restricted just because of snakes. You yourself told me that most of them are harmless."

John gave it up, feeling that the protecting male attitude was somehow no good. "You've found a very nice place," he said, "and it certainly looks safe and comfortable. These fig-trees give the best shade. It's really cool under them."

"Yes, and there is a breeze too from the sea. Look between those boughs; you can see blue water."

He sat down with his back to one of the black trunks. "There are no flies here in the shade," he said with relief. "They are just awful in the long grass." Then after a moment's pause, "Do you sit here long looking at that book? What is in it? What is in books?" He felt antagonism against things that seemed so absorbing, but which were closed to him.

Mrs. Cray answered quite seriously, trying to speak adequately and lead in the best way his unaccustomed mind. "The thoughts and feelings that men have wished

to give to other men are recorded in books. Things that they thought were interesting and beautiful and that they wished other men to share."

"Will you read me some?" said John rather shyly.

"The man who wrote this book wrote about Europe. It is strange to read him here because his book takes me into another life. Europe is so different. It is cooler and older and much more sad than anything here."

"Do read me some."

Mrs. Cray turned the pages for a few moments, then she read very slowly and in an even tone:

"And, like a dying lady lean and pale,
Who totters forth, wrapped in a gauzy veil,
Out of her chamber, led by the insane
And feeble wanderings of her fading brain,
The moon arose up in the murky East,
A white and shapeless mass——"

For a while the young man was silent. The sound charmed him, and his thoughts were occupied with comparing pictures of the veil-wrapped lady and the full moon rising in mist. "That must have been after the rains," he said. "It's not often like that."

"Not here, but in England, where there is much rain even in summer — yes."

"Read me some more," he demanded.

She hesitated. "About what shall I read?"

John was lying now on the ground propped on his elbows. He looked up at her pale face. In her eyes he saw the light of his awakened feeling. Her features were passive through the habit of long-accustomed restraint, but the curves of her rather large mouth were evidence

of a strong spirit. "Read about the time before sunrise," he said.

Again she turned the pages. "No. This is about the night. Listen."

"Swiftly walk over the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave,—
Where all the long and lone daylight
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
Which make thee terrible and dear—
Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle grey
Star-inwrought!
Blind with thine hair the eyes of day;
Kiss her until she be wearied out,
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand—
Come, long-sought!

When I arose and saw the dawn
I sighed for thee;
When light rose high, and the dew was gone
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
And the weary Day turned to his rest,
Lingering like an unloved guest,
I sighed for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,
'Would'st thou me?'
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
Murmured like a noontide bee,
'Shall I nestle near thy side?
Would'st thou me?'—And I replied,
'No, not thee.'

Death will come when thou art dead,
Soon, too soon—

Sleep will come when thou art fled;
Of neither would I ask the boon
I ask of thee, beloved Night—
Swift be thine approaching flight,
Come, soon, soon."

For a long while after she had finished he said nothing. The first wealth of his awakened feeling would be expressed only in silence. At length he said, "The night here is like that. It must be the same everywhere. Will you read it again, please?"

She read now even more slowly than at first, letting the value of each line express itself in the cadence.

"There are some parts that I don't understand, just as there is something in the night. I like the sound. Will you read me some more?" Then impetuously, "Will you teach me to read?"

Touched by his wonder and his glow of enthusiasm she felt in herself and her own power of appreciation the beauty of Shelley's perception. She once more turned the pages, this time in eager search. "You will not understand altogether, but later I will tell you. This is about the spirit of life and all that makes things grow and reproduce and die and hope. It is that spirit speaking:

"From the forests and highlands
We come, we come;
From the river-girt islands,
Where loud waves are dumb.
Listening to my sweet pipings,
The wind in the reeds and the rushes
The bees on the bells of thyme,
The birds on the myrtle bushes,
The cicale alone in the lime,
And the lizards below in the grass,

THE MAINLAND

Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was,
Listening to my sweet pipings

Liquid Peneus was flowing
And all dark Tempe lay
In Pelion's shadow, out-growing
The light of the dying day,
SPEEDED by my sweet pipings.
The Sileni and Sylvans and Fauna,
And the Nymphs of the woods and waves,
To the edge of the moist river-lawns,
And the brink of the dewy caves,
And all that did then attend and follow,
Were silent with love, as you now, Apollo,
With envy of my sweet pipings.

I sang of the dancing stars,
I sang of the daedal Earth
And of Heaven, and the Giant wars
And of Love, and Death, and Birth,—
And then I changed my pipings—
Singing how down the vale of Maenalus
I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed.
Gods and men we are all deluded thus!
It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed:
All wept—as I think both ye now would,
If envy or rage had not frozen your blood—
At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.

John lay still, looking dimly at the distance of the hills from under the heavy branches. There being no envy or rage in his blood, his eyes were filled with tears. Much there was that he had not understood, but the break in the rhythm and the passionate sadness of the words had filled his heart with new happiness and sorrow. A mystery that lay in sounds had been unfolded. Music and melody, half touched by meaning, yet complete in

themselves, flowed past like a river. All his senses unknowing, willing, yet half fearful, were committed to the stream of smooth deep waters. But, while his senses flowed with the music his spirit was full of dread, and could have cried out in pain had a hand been raised in negation against the passionate incompleteness of his desire. Away in the far distance were the fruits of life, but as he contemplated all that was remote for him the perspectives changed so that grey, unformed hopes became translucent with the bright colours of life. From out his first dreamy mood there grew a vivid consciousness of his companion, together with a passionate gratitude for all the wealth of new horizons that she had lifted. He turned to look at her. At that moment all the emotions so newly springing from earth, touched into flowers and strong plants, by the pipes of Pan, all hopes and aspirations gathered from forests, rivers and sea turned into a deep channel of adoration for the woman whose eyes met his own.

A half-conscious fear, that by her look she might deny hopes that were not yet formed, made him speak. "Will you read again, telling me the meaning where I don't understand?"

She told him then some of the stories of mythology, of Pan and of Apollo, of Dryads and Nymphs, spirits of woods and waves, of gods and lesser gods who peopled nature, breathing into all things the spirit of man. These stories, which like reflections on still water represent in colour and outline the life of senses growing in the sultry air, seemed to the young man to share with her the intellectual quality that held her distant and aloof. In all things she was his teacher; he feared the hard edge of

her intelligence, and, though he worshipped her, felt that he must hide his worship.

For a long while they sat talking under the shade of the heavy leaves. As yet John had but a glimpse of the wide horizon that she had spread before him. Eager for knowledge, he plied her with questions, waiting breathless and worshipful upon her answers. Not till the sun was sinking toward the sea's edge did they start back for camp. Then it was John's turn to take command, for they suddenly realized that they must quickly make their way through the high grass if they were not to be overtaken by the swift-falling darkness.



CHAPTER IV

THE WIDE HORIZON

I

TWO months passed, while the pearling industry developed. John and his divers worked regularly in the shallow waters. Pearls were found of various size and value; those that were worth keeping were taken to the small safe on *The Venture* and the better quality shells were stowed in the hold. Now that a regular routine was established, Cray developed a great interest in the natives, devoting his spare time to the study of their social organizations and customs. His evenings were all spent sitting with the elders of the tribe, recording long genealogies and taking notes. This work removed him from the more immediate interests of the camp, and even at meal-times, when he was not telling of his latest research, he would sometimes sit in silence with a faraway look, gazing into abstraction, oblivious of the conversation of the others. Out of these reveries he would come suddenly back when anything had to be decided, and in his incisive manner would discuss and settle all doubtful issues. He was amused and rather pleased when he heard that his wife had undertaken to teach John to read, thinking it an admirable way of giving them both an interest. Once or twice he offered to read with them, but John's slow, uncertain pace was exasperating,

and his quick mind eagerly returned to the fascinating combinations of native sociology.

Julep was much amused. His attitude of knowing wisdom and soft insinuation made John angry. But he himself soon found diversion to his taste. Before he had been ten days on the island he had smilingly announced to Cray that he had taken two ugly little devils of girls under his protection, that he had made a temporary marriage and paid their respective fathers in presents of tobacco, etc. Cray was at first rather annoyed, fearing that there might be jealousy, and that disturbances would arise, but as soon as he had found that the natives were pleased and flattered he had deprecatingly allowed Julep to go his own way, though he had strictly forbidden any native to be brought to the camp. Julep had stayed for a few days, then he had moved his tent to the neck of the promontory. There, with his two wives, he started a polygamous though very primitive establishment. Since his duties kept him much in the camp, and since he had not lost his taste for civilized food, he partook of the meals that he and John prepared, leaving his Bertha and Jenny, as he called them, to arrange for themselves their favourite repast of lightly warmed entrails.

When Julep first went to live with his black wives he had suggested to John that he should come with him, and should take a girl from the tribe. John, although he had refused, had let Julep enlarge on the benefits of a married life. This chaffing talk had created a definite temptation, and although with his picture of Mrs. Cray's high idealism he could refuse so sordid a suggestion, there was in his mind an envious resentment against the more easily satisfied appetite of the elder man. A few days

later he mentioned Julep and his wives to Mrs. Cray, asking for her judgment. She seemed for a moment unwilling to speak, but said, half contemptuously and half in excuse, that for Julep such actions were so much in his character that they were inevitable, and that were he different he would not be so pleasant and simple a person as he was. This answer seemed entirely adequate. What she said about Julep was true, and at the same time it gave John the pleasant assurance that she placed him in a different category, not thinking it possible for him to follow so crude an example.

II

One day when work had been in progress for more than eight weeks the advent of new arrivals caused a great excitement in the island. At the time a load of shell was being stowed under Julep's direction. The large shining surfaces of the pearl shells were laid out on the deck of the cutter and those of inferior quality were being thrown back into the sea. To throw away shells is an extravagance unusual with pearlers, but where there was so limited a storage space they could only afford to keep the best specimens. Work was progressing quietly when suddenly a shout sounded from the hills and natives came running down from their camp shouting out that a large canoe was approaching from the northward, that there was a white man in it with a rifle, besides several black-fellows who were paddling swiftly shoreward.

Cray, who thought that the stranger might be the first of a raiding party, hurried to *The Venture*, taking John with him. They stood by their fire-arms waiting emergencies. In the meanwhile natives ran along the

crest of the promontory shouting out in great excitement the direction taken by the stranger. When at length a long black canoe rounded the point the island to its most inland camps was stirred and all eyes were directed seaward.

The canoe was longer than anything that Cray had seen in the North-West. It was manned by four natives with broad paddles. In the stern sat a white man with a rifle leaned against his knee. He held the big steering paddle in his hands. Close in front of him was a very fair young half-caste girl, and forward in the bows were two other women crouched down in the hollow of the boat. On seeing *The Venture* the strange craft headed straight towards her, approaching to within about fifty yards without a hail. Then the white man at the stern gave the order to easy with the paddles.

They could see now that he was a tight-built, wiry fellow of middle age. His clothes were very ragged and patched, and he wore an obviously home-made rush hat. His face was not prepossessing, there being an unsteady look in his grey eyes. His nose twisted slightly to the side of his face, and his rather small mouth followed its direction. "A good morning's business," he said in the most everyday sort of tone that betrayed a slight American twang, and had in it a touch of sarcasm.

Cray ignored the remark. "Where do you hail from?" he asked.

"Put your mind at ease," the other returned. "Not from Broom or any other of them God-damned, fiddling little one-horse ports. There's an island some sixty miles north. That's where I live. For three years I've been

done with civilization . . . taken to the simple life. See!" As Cray made no comment he went on with a swaggering easiness, "Word came up — it's all round the islands for a hundred miles — that white men that knew native talk (dead black-fellows, some of them said, come back) were on this island after pearl shell. I haven't spoken to a white man for three years, so I've come to pay you a visit. See!" He paused for a moment, regarding the shining shells on the deck. "Pretty good trade I should think here too. I congratulate you on stealing a march on the lousy swine at Broom. I reckon there'd be the devil to pay if they knew your little game."

Cray saw that the fellow was out to score at every point that he could, and that he would have to hold him in hand. By this time the boats were close alongside.

"Will you come on board and have a drink?" he said quietly.

The other hesitated. "What about my boat?"

"That will be all right. I'll send it ashore when my people will see to your men."

"How are you going to trust a lot of black men? You've only been here a couple of months. They'll fight each other like cats."

"They'll do as I tell them. Your fellows won't be hurt. John, you take the boat ashore, and see that the men are given food and drink."

The stranger seemed to be thrown a little off his balance by Cray's authority. After a short pause of indecision — "Well, I don't mind if I do," he said, "and what's your name if I may ask?" Cray gave his name and those of John and Julep. "My name's Peter Trigg,"

said the other as he stepped on board *The Venture*. "How I got to these parts I'll tell you when I've had a wet."

As he stepped out of his boat the half-caste girl called to him, asking some question. He turned and spoke fluently to her in native, and the look of perplexity slowly went out of her face.

"She's frightened," he explained, "but she'd better go with them; they are more afraid of her tongue than of mine."

John was about to take Trigg's place as Cray had directed when Julep stepped forward. "All right, John, I'll take them back," he said. "You stay here. I'll see that they are fixed up."

John yielded his position, amused at Julep's eagerness to go with the half-caste girl, who was young, well-formed, and not displeasing in appearance.

When Julep and the canoe-load of blacks had set off for the shore John brought drinks. Cray and Trigg sat together on the poop of *The Venture*.

"It's a pretty cutter you've got here," began Trigg, taking a more conciliatory tone than at first.

"Yes, she's a good sailer and can outstrip most ships I've sailed on. She can leave behind anything on this coast."

Triggs put out his hand for the tobacco that Cray offered. "I tell you it's a pleasure to speak with a white man again," he said. "I've been alone up here for three years with no one but blacks to speak to."

"How was it you got stranded here?"

"I was shipwrecked off a barque trading between Singapore and Kaimera. I was second mate, and the

only survivor. We were caught in a Willy-Willy and driven ashore."

"Have you been living with natives ever since?"

"Yes, I taught them to cook for me, and taught them to build a decent sized canoe to get about a bit."

"Have you seen no white men?"

"Not one."

"That girl you have with you — who's she?"

"She's my wife — or one of them," he added with a leer. "Out here one takes what one can get."

"But how did a half-caste get here if there are no white men?"

Trigg seemed embarrassed. "Damn it, I don't know," he said, irritated.

Cray did not press the point, but after a short silence asked abruptly, "What is it you want of me?"

"If you'd been alone up here for three years you'd go some little way for company I expect," said Trigg with a note of defiance. Since Cray made no response to this protest he went on. "But to tell the truth I've come to ask a favour. I've had enough of the simple life. Will you give me a passage back when you go? Take me to Kaimera and I'll be more than grateful. I can't pay my passage — I've no money, but I'll work. You'll find I'm a good worker. I know how to knock these niggers about and make them move quick."

Cray poured out a second glass for his guest, and his manner became more genial. "Yes, I'll take you as far as Kaimera willingly, but since I manage my own natives I shall not want your services. Since you are staying on with us till we sail, you'll camp on the island. You'll want your women with you, I suppose?" Trigg nodded.

"Then you had better make your camp near Julep's. I allow no natives in my camp. John will take you across in the dinghy. I expect you'd like to get fixed up pretty soon." He turned now to John. "As for the men, put them down on the flats the other side of the long grass. Speak to Puramatta and Mindolo. Make them responsible."

"I'll have my men with me," broke in Trigg.

"They will be where I choose to put them," said Cray. "That is if you want to stay here and come back with me to Kaimera. I don't have strange natives sleeping near the camp."

Trigg made no further remark but smiled ambiguously as he got into the dinghy to be pulled ashore.

When John returned, Cray, who had in the meanwhile finished superintending the storing of the shells, called him up to the poop; told him to take one of the camp-chairs. He then asked, "What do you think of our new friend?"

"I don't know," said John. "He told me all about his shipwreck."

"That's all a lie I'm convinced," said Cray in a musing tone. "Though how he came to be here I don't know. That man was never a sailor, at least not a second mate."

"What is he, do you think?" asked John.

"Just a typical beach-comber; there are hundreds of them up and down this coast, but one doesn't usually find them so far away. He's the sort of rascal I couldn't trust; probably a thief. His whole story is a make up. With that boat he's built he could get down to Broom in a couple of months by hugging the coast if he wanted to. He's on the look out for pickings, but probably a

fool, like most knaves, and harmless. But you had just as well keep your eye on him while he's here. While he's with us he's all right, but if he did happen to slip away and fall in with a Broom lugger I should have to start rather sooner than I intended."

"What do you think he wants?" asked John, perplexed.

"He's out for gain — anything he can pick up. He'll take anything I choose to give him, and if by betraying us he could get anything from the Broom people, then he'd do it. He's a scallywag."

John, who had never yet met with any double-dealing, found it difficult to believe that a man should appear with an elaborate lie worked out in detail, and was inclined to discuss and even argue the point. Cray, however, said little more, but took the precaution of concealing the small safe in which he had already more than five thousand pounds' worth of pearls.

III

After his first remonstrance concerning his men's quarters Trigg appeared quietly to acquiesce in the order that Cray established. His camp, where he lived with Bella, the half-caste girl, and another of his women, was pitched close to Julep's, near the neck of the promontory. His manner toward Cray was that of a man anxious to please, full of respect, though rather avoiding company, taking his meals at his own camp. With Julep he came a good deal into contact, making every effort to establish friendly relations. In the evenings he asked him over to his own camp, where they smoked and drank together. On these occasions he was quick to see Julep's interest in Bella.

Often he would leave them alone, telling the girl to entertain his guest in his absence.

Bella could talk English fluently, for, a year ago, she had run away from the Catholic mission at Cape Londonderry with Peter Trigg, who was at one time a monk of that institution. Tiring of the monastic life, and being attracted by the light-skinned, voluptuous girl, he had persuaded her to run off. Subsequently she had been of great service in helping with the natives. Anything that he wished she was willing to do, provided always that he promised to stay with her. Now at Trigg's request she did what she could to please Julep to the best of her primitive ability.

In the course of a few days Julep became thoroughly pleased with the companionship of his new friends. Trigg could talk well, telling amusing stories of past experiences. Julep found that he had more in common with him than with Cray's rather remote and superior intelligence or with John's ingenuous ignorance. Trigg on his side gathered much information from these conversations. He learnt what was the approximate value of the pearls already collected, also the share that Julep was to have in the total takings. He gave the opinion that a tenth was too small a proportion for the importance of Julep's work, hinting that it was pretty cool for Cray to take nine-tenths with his by-your-leave, superior manner.

In the day-times Trigg found himself at a loose end; and since Cray would not allow him to have any dealings with the natives, he often spent his time watching Julep at the work of searching for pearls among the shells and flesh of the dead molluscs,

One day of exceptional good luck Julep found two pearls of high quality. Trigg inspected them with greedy eyes. "Well, you're a lucky man to get a tenth of their value, but a damned fool to my thinking not to put them in your pocket and say nothing about them."

Julep, choosing to take this remark in jest, laughed and said nothing.

Trigg continued in a whining argumentative voice. "Why should he have all the swag? You say he's got between ten and twenty thousand pounds' worth. That's enough to buy his boat and outfit and cover his own fair share. You take as much risk as he does. Any man but a natural would take his pickings now and then. Why, he expects it."

"Shut your mouth!" said Julep roused.

"Oh well! it's none of my business," rejoined Trigg laughing, "but one can see you haven't been out here for long. Out here, we've left law and useless convention behind. A man here takes his own price and his own value. That is, if he knows it; and if you ask me our superior friend is not ten times better than other men, though no doubt he thinks he is."

Julep did not answer, but continued his work. He did not altogether resent Trigg's talk; there was some truth, he felt, in that ten times argument, but was not going to encourage it. After a little while he came on another pearl, this time better than any of the others. "Look at that!" he exclaimed in excitement, "it's the best we've found ever since we've been here." He displayed the shining sphere on his palm, then held it to the light. Trigg looked on, critical and excited. "Worth a thousand," he said. "Why, it's a perfect wonder."

Then ironically, "Say good-bye to it, put it in the bag with the rest." He watched Julep, his sneer being reminiscent of the snarl of an exasperated animal. Then suddenly his feeling burst free beyond control. "Some snipes have all the bloody luck! To think of that God-damn-gentlemanly young wouser carrying off the pick of the beach like that — why it makes me cry to say good-bye to a stone of that quality. Here, let me have a look." He bent down and began turning over the shells in wild excitement.

"You leave those shells alone," called Julep, "you've no part in this show."

Trigg jumped up with his hands clenched, leering. "So the little dog growls over his little bone, like the big dog over his big one." He stood looking savage for a moment, then suddenly laughed. "My fault! I shouldn't look at stuff like this. But I know the value of it, know what could be done with the money. That's what makes me mad. There," he laughed out loud, "I'll leave it alone, I don't want it. I'll clear off."

"Yes, you had better," said Julep somewhat mollified.

For a few moments they stood looking at one another. Trigg by this time quite controlled and laughing, Julep stolid under his black brows, but inclined to smile.

"Right you are, I'll clear off, and good luck to your finding," said Trigg as he turned, then walked away whistling.

After he had gone, Julep shook the pearls out into his palm. For a long while he looked at them, turning them this way and that, then with a sigh put them back

into the bag which every evening he was accustomed to hand over to Cray.

IV

That evening Julep showed to Cray, when handing them over, the splendid findings of his day's work.

"We'll be rich men," Cray remarked, highly satisfied. "Another month and we can start home."

They talked of their total takings, and Julep calculated that together from pearls and shell he might receive a share of two thousand pounds. He thought of Cray's nine-tenths enviously. The pearls that he had just handed over to his chief he looked at with a feeling of regret, then consoled himself with the thought that they all went towards the common store. What surprised him that evening was that the safe was not in its usual place, and that Cray merely returned the pearls to the bag and laid them on a shelf in the cabin.

This small incident seemed insignificant at the time, but later it caused disturbing cogitations. He wondered uneasily why Cray had removed the safe from its accustomed place.

V

During the last weeks John had been taking regular reading lessons from Mrs. Cray. Besides teaching him to read, she explained thoroughly the matter that they read, so that John came to have an ever-widening view of the value of civilization and of the progress of man in different ages of history. Such stimulating thoughts, together with his passionate and ever-growing adoration for Mrs. Cray, filled the whole world of his brain. The events of everyday work, the intercourse with Julep and

Cray, and even the advent of Trigg and Bella became merely the grey background over and above which the wings of his imagination could feel the yielding air, preparatory to strong flights into mists of hope and aspiration.

If it is ever possible for the human soul to know happiness, it is surely in that trembling flight of imagination, ready to fling all destiny to the fair promise of desire. In these first weeks John was supremely happy, but the early happiness was short-lived, for he began to notice that Mrs. Cray gradually withdrew herself from him, and even seemed to avoid his company. There were still times when she read with him, but on these occasions she talked much less than formerly. It now appeared that she selected only dull and prosy things, deliberately building up a wall between their eager senses of appreciation which at first so joyfully had mingled, gaining from each other additional strength.

Both day and night John was consumed by the thought that she was cutting herself off from him, becoming always more remote. For a while he bore his pain in silence, then, after many nights of troubled thought, during which his manhood was strengthened by suffering, he determined to confront her and demand the reason for so denying their friendship. How had he displeased her, or in what had he failed?

Since their division Mrs. Cray seldom went for walks in the evening, and John no longer had opportunity of finding her alone. Lately she had taken to walking in the early mornings, when she knew that he was at work with the divers. After a night of much deliberation and

painful thought John determined to leave his work the next morning in the charge of one of the chief natives who could be trusted. He would then be free to find Mrs. Cray by herself and demand an explanation.

He followed her track from the camp, and came upon her sitting under some close-grown stunted bushes on the cliff's edge. Round about, the grass was luxuriant, but had been kept short by the constant passage of the wind. She looked up, surprised to see him, greeting him with a faint trace of alarm. With words that she knew were insincere she tried to gain time until she could read his meanings. "Is anything wrong at the camp? Why are you not at your work?"

He stood in front of her, rendered inarticulate by the difficulty of his task, charged with emotion. From the pose of her slight figure as she sat on the grass with hands clasped round her knees he could see that she was nervous, and now that it had come to speaking, he realized how brutal and stupid were any words at his command. "No, the camp's all right," he blurted out. Then desperately, "Why do you avoid me? You hardly speak to me now, but keep away."

"But I don't avoid you. You must imagine it."

"You do. You know you do. What have I done to make you like that?"

"You imagine it, John." Then rather coldly, "I like to be by myself sometimes, that's all."

He stood biting his lips, very red in the face. "I'm sorry if that's it. I've been stupid, good-bye." He turned fiercely away, his voice trembling with mortification.

"John, come here," she called. "Come here, John." He paused, uncertain. "Come and sit down, don't be angry."

He came back two paces. "What is it?" he said.

"I've been horrid, I know. Sit down. Let me talk."

He remained standing, obstinate in resistance.

"While we were friends I was happy," she continued, "more happy than you know. You were the first friend I'd had for ever so many years. I don't make many friends. I'm always travelling, you see. My husband, he also has very few friends, just one or two whom he sees occasionally. Men don't like him for the most part, and he never bothers about women. When we left Kaimera I loved those days at sea and the expeditions on shore. I liked it when you told me about wild creatures and when I showed you in books things that were new and beautiful to you." She looked now distressfully at him. "But you don't understand how it is when people are married. My husband doesn't like me to see so much of you. It's not that he's jealous," she added quickly, "but he just——" she paused for words, then finished lamely, "told me not to."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes."

"He has no right."

"John, don't get angry. You don't understand. It's like this in all marriages. There is so much in which a husband and wife must consider each other."

The young man looked hard at her anxious face. "You're not happy," he said.

"Oh, happiness is not a thing to be bothered about."

"But you, who could be happy — why aren't you?"

"I am sometimes, and have been, as you know."

"Not often I'm sure. You change so much."

"Few people are, but it would never do if we all cried about our little tin-pot tragedies."

With the simple directness of extreme youth, his voice full of concern and sympathy, he asked, "What is it that hurts you?"

In their simplicity the words fell with extraordinary appeal. She knew that it was wrong to speak, but feelings that for years had been suppressed surged up to find expression.

"Sit down, John, and I'll tell you. Don't stand like a judgment over me." He obeyed, sitting in the sunlight opposite to her. Her eyes were very wide open, fixed steadily upon him. He knew that she was speaking from her heart. "I've never had any home. I've always travelled, travelled, and my husband he doesn't really care about me. All his life he lives in his own mind, in his plans and schemes. He could never recognize a woman's life. I simply don't exist. Haven't you seen?"

"Yes," said John, unable to speak more. Then after a long pause, "But he's so nice. I'm awfully fond of him. Oh! how stupid! But why does he mind ——" She cut him short.

"John, you must be my friend. Perhaps I shouldn't have told you. Be my friend. Don't show anything — I am glad of you. . . . Just be as you are. . . . You have made a great difference to my life. . . . Don't show that you know anything about me, or think of me. Let us be as we have been. If I have helped you to a little, you have helped me ten times more."

"How?"

"By being what you are," she smiled, "unspoiled and able to see all the things that I see."

He was unspeakably glad of what she said, feeling that they had come very far from where they started. His mind harked back. "But then I must be allowed to see you."

She hesitated in uncertainty. "Yes, but not too much."

"Can we go out as we used to and read?"

"Yes, sometimes, but not too often."

With more feeling betrayed in his voice than he had intended he said, "You don't know how I look forward to those times."

Mrs. Cray looked a little distressed. After a silence she said, "John, I want you to be very sensible. Remember that I am ever so much older than you are—more than ten years. You have seen nothing of life and I have seen so much, and have lived before I was married far more than you have." John, only half understanding her thoughts and finding them contradictory, remained silent. To break this silence she went on rather lamely, "You must be willing always to take my advice."

Looking at her now, as she sat opposite him, the young man felt her present weakness and uncertainty. He felt, too, a quality of enveloping mystery of which he was ignorant. There was something between them and around them at that moment greater and stronger than themselves. They were in the shadow of a falling wave. It bent over them, and then hung suspended. An impulse rose to say how much he worshipped her, to lie at her feet and touch the edge of her skirt, to declare that she was everything that was beautiful and wonderful in the

world, that when she was absent all things were transfused into an urging hope for his next view of her, and that when she was present the world was perfect, throbbing with inexpressible hope. But to say any of these things would be vain and useless. They would be false in their inadequacy. She would see their falseness and would be displeased. She would be kind out of compassion. He did not wish to appear a fool and weak. Yet, under the shadow of the threatening wave, there surged up his weakness and folly. Only by looking away out to sea at the far-stretching waters was he able to keep down that flood of inadequate words. The extent and placidity of the distant ocean gave new assurance. The secret of himself, yet unknown, he must keep hidden, willing to accept in gratitude the certainty of the patient earth, of the smiling sea, of the land, beautiful and rugged, crumbling beneath its weight.

His companion was also looking out over the sea. On that wide horizon he knew that they could meet and perhaps smile untroubled to one another. In the forests, in the life of the jungle, and on the sea was light-hearted happiness. That was where she wished them to meet; and in the silence of their look seaward was the strength of her hope. The secret of himself was yet dark and unveiled, though a moment ago it had pulsed through his temples and heart. Now as he gazed on the beauty of the tropical morning he became placid, sure of himself. He had been promised friendship, that was happiness sufficient and overflowing.

When at length he turned to her he saw that she was filled with immaterial joy and that they could share with each other their appreciation. For a brief moment

their eyes met in recognition of common happiness. Then Mrs. Cray exclaimed as she jumped up, "We'll be shockingly late for breakfast if we don't hurry. I don't know what will be said about your cutting work."

"No one will know," said John light-heartedly.

In this he was quite right; and since they were not even late for breakfast no remark was made about their morning walk together.

VI

On a rough matting of dry grass under the shadow of bushes covered by an awning the half-caste girl Bella lay smoking her pipe and gazing out over the length of the bay, where natives could be seen at work on the beach and in the water. The idle life on the island suited her; having nothing to do, she was able to rest in the shade during the long hours of sunlight. In the evenings Trigg would return, and she would get up and cook for him. He had promised to take her down south where they would live together as man and wife, able to enjoy the many benefits of civilization. Having had some years of a mission education, Bella well understood the value of money. She was fond of Trigg for the primitive and sufficient reason that he had paid her the attention of running off with her. Also she knew that she was lucky to live with a white man rather than be claimed by the elders of the tribe and live like a native. If she had any anxiety, it was to get safely south with her man, and there be established, with him dependent upon her services. She knew that she had been indispensable in the past when they were amongst the tribes, but, now that they had fallen in with these white people, she feared that he

might possibly desert her. This fear was always present at the back of her mind and could not be banished by his assurances. Now, as she lay in the shade sucking her pipe, she turned over all the possibilities of their voyage towards civilization. She felt that she needed a firmer hold.

Towards evening Trigg climbed up over the sand-hills and stooped under the shelter of the awning. She did not greet him, but looked up, half-turning on her side. Trigg sat down on an empty case that served as a chair and began striking at the flies with his whisk. "It's cool in here under the bushes," he said, "but my word! it's hot on the beach. They've got some stuff there that's worth handling. These fellows are in luck's way. I've never seen anything like it. It's a good thing they are on to, no mistake." Then screwing up his eyes and looking at the girl between the lids, "If only I could get a little of it, we'd be all right for my farm. But they are close — want to keep it all to themselves — though there's more than enough for us all."

"What for you not take some?"

Trigg laughed. "That's just what I want to do, but it's not so easy. That fellow Cray, he's sharp, and Julep is too big a fool to see his own interest." Then leaning back and striking at the flies. "Mind you, I'll get some of it all right — no fear. I've settled that — but how?"

After a silence he leant forward, again screwing up his eyes. "There's no change to be got out of Cray or that young Sherwin, who's as green as grass for all his red head — but Julep, he's the sort of fool we ought to be able to tackle. Look here, Bella, you can help, and it's that I want to talk about. He's a bit set on you, I think,

by the look of things. Well, draw him on a bit; warm him up. Let him cuddle you, but don't let him get too close, see! You know how to take care of yourself. Lead him on, get him hot and feverish, keep him so. He's the sort to rise easy."

The girl lay still, regarding Trigg with dreamy eyes, vacant of expression.

Not quite sure of her, Trigg questioned, "He's not a bad sort of fellow for a girl, is he?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "No."

"Well, can you manage him?"

"I think so. What do you do then?"

He avoided the question. "Those pearls, Bella, some of them are worth more than I could get in ten years. If I can get hold of a few you can be comfortable, have your own servant, live like a lady. Plenty of money for ribbons and looking-glass. Now just do as I ask and leave the pearls to me. You ask me what I'm going to do. I don't quite know, but Julep's the line. Once get his nose down on the track and his fool eyes and ears shut, and I'll get the money, you leave that alone."

"How long you stay here?" she asked suspiciously.

"Oh! I don't know. Long enough to best him and Cray too. Come, he's not a bad sort of fool for a girl to play with. You'll have your fun out of it!"

"That time you get plenty pearls. What happen then? You go south quick fellow, no mistake?"

"Yes, we could get away amongst the islands for a bit in my canoe and then down to Broom. There we could get a steamer to Kaimera, go on the gold-fields—keep a pub and a store, or take a sheep run, do as you like. Have plenty money."

Bella stretched herself and lay back comfortably. She laughed softly. "All right — Julep easy fellow. He come along here some time talk plenty much. He want me go along of bush with him."

"Oh, does he? Well, mind you keep him waiting."

She nodded in assurance, and Trigg smiled, pleased with his scheme. As an afterthought he added, "Don't you say anything to him about the pearls. Leave that to me, see!"

She took tobacco from the pouch that he held out. "I hear one black fellow say big corroboree by and by."

"Yes, there'll be one towards morning up on the hill. The people from the camp are all turning out I believe. If I can slip away I get over to the boat and see what's to be seen."

"Very well, I go along corroboree find Julep." She chuckled mischievously, and Trigg gave her an affectionate kick.

"You bad woman," he said, knowing that she exactly understood his wishes and could be trusted to carry them out.

VII

Since their morning walk together, when Mrs. Cray had let her suppressed feelings find a momentary expression, John's adoration for her calm serenity had been enriched by pity. That he should know of her discontent caused him pain and secret delight. In experience he had realized no unhappiness which did not openly make itself manifest; only in imagination, throbbing with sympathy, could he contemplate her dignified endurance. With all his hopes he embraced that courage in her, which does not cry out, and which enables to live,

together with unhappiness, the flying delights of the moment. This knowledge gave to his mind a new-born joy, a joy which left his heart filled with a most poignant ache. Interest in his work faded, leaving the day's task mechanically to be accomplished. It was as if some presence were always with him, complaining of his irreverence, making demands, vague and intangible, that remained unsatisfied. If he worked he was restless, disgusted with himself, and if he stopped to look into his heart and there seek to recognize the intruder he felt his inside go cold within him, and worked on again for fear lest he should shiver.

Towards Cray, John's feelings were mixed and very uncomfortable. He liked Cray — loved him with the hero-worship of youth. Certainly he admired his chief's intelligence, but was puzzled at the stupidity of his neglecting so rare and wonderful a being as his wife. Towards this stupidity he felt an anger which would have found expression had not his good sense warned him that it would have been ridiculous. To attempt criticism would be useless and would involve being snubbed. What Mrs. Cray had not been able to effect, he had better leave alone.

In a way he was glad that Cray was stupid in this one most important respect. Yet had it been put to him that by any act he could make happiness where there was now estrangement he believed that he could gladly have found his one delight in his friends' mutually-recovered appreciation. What baffled him in Cray was that he didn't seem to realize that anything was wrong. He appeared supremely pleased, especially with himself; John was left wondering at his obtuseness.

When they were all three together John felt the bonds

of his friendship with Mrs. Cray grow taut and strong. He knew her thoughts, or at any rate some of them. He saw how much she was unappreciated, and with all the prodigality of youth longed to offer the unvalued wealth of his soul as recompense. Here again Cray remained oblivious of their feelings; but John felt that Mrs. Cray understood and rather feared his passionate desire to give all and more than he had. His desire for giving could never be satisfied; he had, so it seemed, little to give. Besides, she was shy of accepting. Any protestations would be killed by the chill of her dignity. His sympathy, to be allowed her presence, must be always veiled, hidden beneath the hard shell of everyday cheerfulness. He felt that she tutored him. Like a child, agile to learn and eager for approval, he walked at her discretion. He was pleased only if he could please her, and yet something unnamed within him scorned his child's humility. Though his mind might be conquered and in happy bondage, his heart still rebelled, making him to roam by night along the beaches cold and hot by turns, in the cool air. In his isolation he had no precedent; he knew only of what was within himself: the disharmony and conflict, the joy and the pain, and the strange shivering at night. Sometimes he came near to understanding that there might be a remedy in the functioning of his own life, but he doubted that audacity in himself, unwilling to find both intelligence and soul but contained fractions of his body's need.

As for the other white men on the island, John saw and thought little about them. Trigg he instinctively disliked, and from Julep he wished to keep hidden his present thoughts and feelings. He spent a good deal of

time by himself (though he attempted not to appear moody), and, only because Cray urged him, did he promise to be present at the corroboree that the native tribes were preparing.

On the appointed night he went, together with Cray and Julep, up through the long grass towards the forest-clad hills. Several tribes from neighbouring islands had gathered to witness the sacred dances, and as Cray's party moved forward, they were conscious of stirring grass on either side and of shapes which kept themselves hidden.

The corroboree was to be followed by the initiation of certain youths, and would be the sign for the commencement of the spring period of Saturnalia. Later there would probably be tribal fights, but these would not occur during the first few days.

Cray had been much interested in all the preparations, and had of late deserted the work on the beaches to spend his days inland talking to the tribal elders, taking notes of their customs, and making genealogies. This new interest appealed to his active mind as even more engrossing than the quick fortune that, day by day, grew beneath his hand. He believed that in these primitive men might be found the source and mingling of all the nascent prejudices of religion, ethics and social custom. In the evenings he sat alone in his tent writing out his day's notes, sometimes gazing in abstraction over the sea while some new idea took shape in his mind.

At the place where the dance was to be held the natives were ranged in a wide half-circle of small groups, each centred about a fire of glowing sticks. On the right of the curve was a pile of brushwood fifteen feet high. In

the centre was bare ground beaten hard and smooth. Cray took his place a little to the rear on the left wing and sat down with John and Julep to watch the ceremony. By this time bull-roarers were sounding from all points, their varying modulations sounded as the voices of bush-spirits, strong in expectancy, speaking of things of deep significance.

The groups of natives were singing in a nasal, monotonous chant. One group would slowly lift the refrain from a low, rasping dirge, like waves upon a pebbly beach, to the high-pitched scream of the under sough in a tempest. Imperceptibly they would drop it to a whisper and the faint tenderness of broken voices. When the spirit of the song was almost dead, the next group would take it up, remake it, give the same fierce climax, the same fading death, then pass it on. Sometimes possessed by the spirit of the land and of dead generations, they would sing all together, and, as the blue smoke-spires wafted dimly up into the darkness above the embers, John felt his flesh quiver and little ripples of emotion creep over his skin as his heart beat fast in response. Cray's eyes shone with excitement. His clear-cut features, catching the firelight, symbolized the advance of man's intelligence from out the early birth of emotion.

This singing continued with the same monotony and the same variations till the first glimmer of dawn; then, without any warning, an old man stepped into the bare space in the centre. There was at once silence. For a minute or more he harangued in a loud voice, then stepped back into the bushes. At once a flame ran up the pile of brushwood, and at the same instant the women bent their heads to the earth, hiding their faces under skins,

lest they should see or hear sights or sounds of magic allowed to men alone, making at the same time a moaning noise. The dry brushwood blazed into a roaring flame, and into the open space of bright light there came eleven male figures dressed for the dance. Their bodies were blackened all over with soot and oil, long red and white streaks of clay shone brightly against this background. On the hips and shoulders were tufts of emu feathers, while on their heads, or rather round their faces, were the sacred waninga or head-dresses. These, spider-web fashion, radiated out from the face, which was thrust through a hole in the centre. The connecting strands, covered with white down, were sometimes smeared with clay. Varying in size from small ovals, not more than two feet across, to shapes which touched the ground and stood ten feet high, they presented an irregular and weird appearance. The dancers proceeded with sharp, mechanical movements, knees and elbows bent, jerkily twisting in their hands white down-covered sticks as they danced. Their conventional steps and gestures suggested automata sprung of a sudden from the earth to express some of its savage significance. With heads thrust forward and with features fixed in a set grin, their movements portrayed a complex of emotions. Piety was there, deliberate and enduring; savagery, abrupt with fierce intentions; a mystic seriousness, a phallic facetiousness, an intense grotesque maleness more pious than the grave endurance of a thousand madonnas.

While the figures shifted in the slow maze of the dance the nasal chant swung through all its modulations, supported always on the undercurrent of the low moans of the women.

The brushwood, which had burnt quickly with a fierce blaze, as quickly died down. As the flames flickered and fell the dancers withdrew into the darkness of the trees. The old man who had announced their coming ran out into the open gesticulating, then the women raised their faces and the onlookers became suddenly aware of the first faint traces of morning to the eastward. The long chant ceased, the corroboree was over, and in small groups the natives began to move away into the bush.

Throughout the dance John had sat rigidly still, while his heart beat fiercely in response. There had come over him a sense of new power. It seemed that the secret of his body's self had been revealed. He held the clue to life; had brushed against the mystery of the male sex, and had come away strengthened with savage power from the contact. He was isolated by the sudden poignancy of his own existence. The dispersing figures of the natives seemed like forms seen through thick glass. In this world of shapes his attention could be fixed, able to take notice, yet somehow removed. He saw that Bella was standing not far away. He felt a passing attraction for the shape of her bare shoulder and breast, then her sallow face and narrow eyes repelled him. She moved leisurely across the open space, stood at an opening in the trees and looked back, then disappeared into the bush. Julep rose with a kind of slow deliberation and walked, like some great animal wakened from sleep, across the open, pushed his way through the trees that had closed behind her, and was lost to sight. John watched and understood. He was himself far away, living intensely in his own heart.

He looked round at Cray, and felt anger that he should

be making notes in a book. He resented the power that could hold aloof, valuing all things through cold intelligence. Cray looked up, smiling. "That was worth staying up all night for, eh?" then he went on with his notes. John could see that he had already sketched the positions of the groups of natives and the brushwood fire. "Yes," he answered, unable and unwilling to say anything else. He did not envy that objective detachment; his feeling appeared more important.

Abruptly he walked away. He had a sudden vision of a certain piece of cliff's edge that he wished to be on, feeling an absolute conviction that Mrs. Cray would walk there as soon as the sun was up. It was now an hour or more to sunrise, and if he ran he could be there in half the time. He started off to walk, unwilling to get there too soon; but before long his limbs carried him along in a steady run.

He had to wait nearly an hour, during which time he sat perfectly still concealed in the bushes. When at length she came he waited till she was near, then walked to meet her.

"I knew you would come here," he said.

She checked and reddened. Her voice was rather high-pitched with sudden excitement. "How?"

"I've been waiting an hour."

"But why?" She drew back a step, but not sufficient to escape his hands upon her wrists. From her wrists they went to her shoulders, and in a moment she was in his arms and his lips were on her mouth. Unresistingly she suffered his kisses.

If she had tried to repulse him, he knew that he had

power to overcome her resistance. He was sure of his new strength and master. While he kissed her, she lay quite still with her blue eyes wide open. Trembling, though masterful, he held her. In her eyes he could see that there was no resistance. He could see that there was joy, but as he gazed he saw that somewhere in the depths of her passivity there was something unknown which made him pause. He could not find thought for what it was; gradually it filled him with awe, and touched his heart with a flutter of fear. His grasp became more gentle, not so masterful. He felt he could not hold her gently enough. He almost feared to look into her eyes, feared now to kiss her. His hands trembled to her shoulders, then fell. He stood looking at her abashed.

She put out her hand to his bare arm. "What is it?"

"Everything! I don't know! I had to!"

She looked at him very frankly. "Yes, I know. I've seen it, and been afraid."

"Why afraid?"

"You see I'm married and ever so much older than you are. I knew that there was danger, but was glad of you." Then very seriously, "John, I have tried to avoid you."

"But marriage makes no difference. You've not been happy!"

"Yes, in myself always."

"Not — not happy as now?"

"No."

"Are you glad?"

Very slightly she inclined her head but did not answer.

"Will you kiss me? Thank you."

"You silly, John," she laughed, "you mustn't say thank you for kisses."

He blushed, feeling himself a child. Where indeed had his strong and primitive impulses vanished?

In her easy triumph she turned towards the sea that lay shining and placid far beneath them clothed in the morning light. From its wide bright eye she seemed to gain added confidence. John felt her strength and was inarticulate. Her airy spirit dominated him, making to recede all recollections of primitive male aborigines. In his submission he could take infinite pleasure in the sight of her free body, the intake of her breath, and the rising sunlight, yet cold from the sea, reflected on her hair. All the restraint of their first separation vanished. He had risen to an equality, while yet remaining in subjection. The relationship seemed perfect. With a smile she turned, meeting the love and adoration of his eyes. "There's time to walk on. I want to get higher up, to see right down the long beach."

His hand took hers with unembarrassed happiness as they walked further along the cliff's edge. Their talk was of all the small things that have so much significance: the few flowers by the way, the coral pools and the long beaches, ants and insects on the ground at their feet, birds in the air, and in the water the sleepy turtles that browse off beds of seaweed.

When they turned to walk back they kissed again in silence, then, to assure himself of his supreme joy, he held her hand very tight as they retraced their steps. He had an impulse to turn, to stay away all day that they might go together to the end of the island. She laughed,

admitting that it would be splendid, but would not allow him.

Together they walked back in their new-won happiness, John envying the flying minutes, yet unspeakably glad in the thought of the morrow and the day after. He was a child. She had made him a child after all — a happy child walking upon air.

VIII

Although Bella had walked leisurely across the open space while she knew that she was being watched, she moved very quickly when once hidden by the trees. Julep, following hot on the scent, was disappointed to see nothing of her when once under the shadow of the covering branches. Peering about in the dim light he could see only the tree-trunks and the black roofing of leaves. He walked first in one direction then in another, making casts, looking behind wide stems, deliberate in his search. At length puzzled, he stooped to examine her footmarks, but these were already made indistinct by his own, which had many times crossed the trail. While he was on all fours with eyes close to the earth he heard a laugh and looking up saw the object of his search perched in the fork of a bough about ten feet from the ground.

"You look plenty hard you find him," laughed Bella, swinging out one of her little yellow legs so that a foot waved above Julep and then was withdrawn to safety.

"So you've got up a tree?" he said smiling. "What made you do that?"

"I like climb tree. Nice place here."

"Nice place is it? Is there room for two?"

"Maybe — not plenty room. You too big fellow," and she laughed again, the clear rippling laugh of the natives, expressive of unclouded merriment.

Julep went to the tree-trunk and tried to reach the bough to swing himself up. After several vain attempts he muttered that the damned bough was too high and slippery to get a grip on. "How did you get up?" he asked.

"Use my toes plenty much. You too heavy."

Julep walked back under her perch. "You come down. What you want to sit up there for?"

"I plenty all right here. What for come down?"

"I'll get a crick in my neck if I stand here looking up. Come down and be a bit sociable."

"What for?" she pouted.

For a while he looked at her provoking and desirable little body, then, realizing that she had the best of it, lolled back against one of the large supporting roots, from which position he could see her more easily. He could now talk without straining his neck, and guessed that she would make the next advance. This she did by swinging her dainty young legs clear of the branch so that he had an admirable view of the soft elegance of their curves.

"You tired fellow?" she asked.

"Well, I'm not go-going to stand here and get my neck twisted, you little tree-puss."

"What for tree-puss?" she asked as she slid her body a little further down the bough and waved her bare legs.

Julep watched his opportunity, then sprang up, only just missing a foot which swung into safety. She gave a high-pitched scream and a laugh of triumph.

"Bella, don't be a damned little fool!" She saw that he was angry and giggled, swinging her foot nearer. "Yes, you've got damned pretty little legs," he said recovering his temper. "Here, let's have hold." He stretched a hand up.

"You promise not to pull me down?"

"You come along."

"You promise true fellow?"

"Come along."

Gingerly she let her foot come nearer. His hand clasped on the little round heel. With his other hand he stretched up, feeling the warm calf to the soft skin inside the knee.

"Oh, Bella, come down; don't be a damned fool."

"What for? If you pull I kick."

"Would you ——? Damn!" He caught the other foot. In this position of security he waited, smiling in good-natured triumph. To his senses it was not so pleasant to take a woman against her will as with her consent. "Now let go, I'll catch you," he suggested pleasantly.

She pouted remonstrance. "Too long way to fall. You let go, perhaps I come down."

"But I can catch you." With hands holding her ankles he moved her legs to and fro. "Now come on or I'll have to pull you."

Bella looked round furtively in all directions, then letting go her hold she stretched out her hands, letting herself slip from the bough.

Julep caught her in a hot embrace, holding her body close, seeking her mouth with his lips. For a moment she rested passive, then with a lithe twist ducked under

his arm. It needed all his quickness to catch her by the shoulders before she could escape. With fierce, petulant gestures she strove for freedom, but firmly he drew her to him, and at last she submitted to his long kiss, lying without resistance in his arms.

Trigg's cynical voice broke the silence. "A very pretty scene which I am sorry to interrupt, Mr. Julep." This was a cold douche to passion. Bella wrenched herself free with a squawk of alarm. "So that's your little game — with another man's wife, is it?" Trigg continued.

Julep's surprise, or "flummuxment" as he would have described it, was so complete that he could only mutter inarticulately, "Most men in such circumstances would look foolish"; and he felt that he was no exception.

Trigg turned to the girl. "Now you clear off home, quick. I got to talk to our friend Mr. Julep. Get!"

After the girl had gone Trigg stood looking at Julep, his eyes screwed up, as was his way, and eyebrows raised wrinkling his forehead. Julep was uncomfortable under the inspection. "What the hell do you want?" at last he broke out. Trigg, without changing the position of his features, let appear the suggestion of a whimsical smile. It was to be seen that his mood was not dangerous, though the advantage was with him. He came a step nearer. He would talk no doubt, perhaps try to play the bully, Julep couldn't be sure. In the meanwhile the silence, and that quizzing expression was trying. "Well, what do you want?"

"Look here, Tom," Trigg began in his slow Yankee fashion, "we've been moderate good mates while we've been on this island; but this one thing's plain — as plain

as that you've got first look in at the pearls — that girl belongs to me. See? "

Julep was stolid, not to be bullied; he answered in the same whimsical vein as Trigg had adopted. "No need to make a fuss, she's only a black girl."

"Black or white or yellow, she's mine to do just what I like with." He laid emphasis on the last words. Then suddenly veering from the subject and speaking quickly before Julep had time to answer, "How much longer are you staying on before you sail? "

"Don't know for sure — month or six weeks. We shall get away before the 'Willy-Willies.' What's that to do with it? "

"I was only thinking how long you'd be stewing round after that girl — supposing I was to stay. Oh, she's a one — a clever girl. Time for a nice little honeymoon. But she'd do as I tell her, no fear of that."

"What are you driving at? "

"I was thinking, that's all." He stopped and scratched his head. "When I was up north and coming down the coast I saw plenty of black fellows. I looked at the girls and the men as owned them. The same rule was everywhere. If you stole another man's girl or tried to you were speared for sure, but there wasn't a man who would wouldn't *sell* — for good price. As you say, she's a black girl."

As Julep understood Trigg's meaning his heart gave a thump, for Bella had tempted him. He felt as if he had been robbed of his natural food, but could now afford to smile as he questioned, "What price? "

"A share of the pearls, Tom. You can have the girl

for as long as you like, but you must let me in." Julep hesitated. "That's my only price, and if you don't take it—well, I'm sick of hanging about here with nothing to do—I shall clear off and take Bella with me. I don't want much, but I want a share."

"Some of them are mine," Julep admitted after a silence. "I suppose I can trade with what's my own."

"Of course you can. Can you get at them handy?" Julep was embarrassed. "As a matter of fact I can't just now."

"What, do you hand them all over to him?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you know where he keeps them?"

"I did, but they've been moved."

"Don't you know where they are?"

"No."

"Well, you are . . ." Trigg whistled. "Not only do you let him take nine-tenths, you give him the blooming lot."

"I used to know where they were," said Julep in defence, "but he's moved them."

"Of course he has," nodded Trigg, as though it was a foregone conclusion, "now he's got a rich lot. Oh, Tom, you want some one to look after you." Then after contemplating the unfortunate Julep with a pitying stare, "I suppose you know how many there were and what worth there was in the safe, and what your own share is. Perhaps you don't know that?"

"He'll have to bring them out if I ask him and share up as we said," growled Julep.

"Will he? How do you know he's not taken out the best of them? What's to make him hand them over?"

Why should he hide them away if he's not going to keep them?"

"I know all the best ones when I see them," said Julep, by this time thoroughly uncomfortable. "He'll give them up all right."

"You think so? What made him put them away?"

The repeated question was extremely irritating to Julep's nervous and suspicious state. He looked Trigg straight in the face. "With a scamp like you about a man would be only wise to hide them."

Trigg had not been expecting this blow. "No need to get personal because you've shown yourself a mug. Well, go and ask him. Perhaps he'll give you a few little ones to keep you quiet, but, before you make a bigger fool of yourself than you've made already, remember this: he's got the shooting-irons, he's got the boat, he's got the pearls; you've got nothing except a love of women which won't carry you far I guess." Trigg turned as though finished with so outrageous a fool.

"Well, wa-what the hell would you do?"

"Make *sure* of your own share. Go carefully. Find out where the stuff's kept, and see that you get it at the end of the trip. I'll help you. I can't be left out. It's more than human nature can bear to see all these pearls and not have a hand in. You have a tenth — well, give me a fifth of your tenth. I'll see you get your share and perhaps a bit over, and you can have the girl for as long as you like." Trigg shoved his face near, very excited. "I'll see you get your money. It's bad luck his hiding it. That's good enough for me, but we'll get it. Now for God's sake don't say anything."

"And if I don't agree?" said Julep, suddenly very stolid.

"Then I shall clear off."

Julep's black brows contracted, making a thick bar across his face. "I can have the girl tonight?"

"Tonight? Yes, tonight, and I'll come down on to the beach this afternoon and help you look over the shell that the boys bring in. We're likely to find something, eh?"

"Very well," said Julep, and nodded in agreement.

The only black boy not at the corroboree that night was Tea-cup, who had followed Peter Trigg on his night wandering. He had followed him down to the beach, and knew that he had swum out to the cutter and had come back very much annoyed at finding that Mrs. Cray was sleeping on board; then he had followed him to his own camp, and after that into the bush. The scene with Julep he had witnessed, but less than half understood. His senses were quick to appreciate that his loved master might perhaps be in danger and that Julep was likely to go over to the enemy.

Full of evil forebodings, he determined to be more watchful than ever.

CHAPTER V
THE MIRAGE

I

THOUGH indeed it is usual for man to be thwarted in not only his desires but even in the birth of aspiration, yet sometimes blind circumstance, by a malicious or seemingly happy chance, will allow sunshine and kindly rain to nourish the flowers which lie hidden and urgent in the human soul, and let grow those airy palaces, structures of more than earthly beauty, which so swiftly rise trembling in the vapours of a mirage. Such glory and such mirage gave indeed a blessed drunkenness, a joyful agony, a fever which can become august only in its consuming and in its death. What is indeed blessed and cannot be taken from us, even in the bitterness of the desert, is that the mirage was *real*. Our happy fancies, better than ourselves, peopled those palaces. The earth was left below: we were forgetful. All earthly measurements were of the past; values became nebulous, to be created anew, nearer the heart's desire.

So, before eyes, filled with the hope of youth; the mirage grew to the beat of John's impulsive heart. The occasions for meeting Mrs. Cray became numerous. They did not have to be planned, they happened. At first John had no thought for the future, it was enough that he could meet her today, sure of tomorrow; but later,

when he came to know more of her life, he began to realize her need of a home and all the things she had lived without. Out of this knowledge there came a hope, at first remote, but growing quickly in strength, that he might be able to supply her need. Often they talked about his father and the life on Kanna Island. Then he would speak (impersonally always, though conscious of its personal application) of life on the mainland, sheep farming and other means of earning a living.

One day he questioned whether Cray would not suspect their so frequent absences, reminding her of the earlier protest. Mrs. Cray blushed, admitting that the protest had in truth never been made, but that she had herself invented it because she was afraid of their growing intimacy. "He would never say anything of that sort," she added; "besides he is so occupied with his own life, he never thinks about me." This admission made John know some of his power. It was a new thought that she should have feared him in that way, and now that he had broken down the barrier he felt strong enough to accept all obligations to challenge all hazards.

Another result of their intimacy was that John became conscious of himself. On Kanna Island he had thought little of his appearance; but now she made him cognizant of his body. She admired his brown skin, his wavy thick hair and strong neck and shoulders. He was very glad that she found him admirable. With self-appreciation came new power. He knew that his body was himself, understanding that it was an appeal, a sense of pleasure to her sight and touch just as the firm smoothness of her hand and the gentle moisture of her lips filled him with unutterable joy. He worshipped her body,

finding his own admirable, exalted by her response to the sense of a mutual approval.

With the coming of self-realization there grew also power, threatening her reserve. He felt his manhood, knowing not how to wield it. Their intellectual sympathy was always her defence. The untried motives of the boy she was able to control, directing towards the realm of ideas that ferment within, which to her nature was so stimulating, to her intelligence so fraught with danger and even with absurdity. Books had been half of her life; into this world she could lead him, gaining an easy mastery. For hours sometimes she read aloud, while his virgin mind drank in rich essences distilled by poets from the stuff of civilization. Of books she had a great store. Together they dipped into histories and into sciences. She told him something of religions, speaking of them as of plants which grew, to bloom, wither and be replaced. He came to see civilization as the increase of mankind, mastering, through the ages, the urgencies of its own expansion. She read to him from anthologies of poems, and in boyish enthusiasm he learnt long verses to declaim against the roar of the surf, or to speak slowly on solitary cliff tops. Thus, holding off the menace of his sex, she could remain unperturbed, yet with her mind could embrace the picture of young manhood afire with the imaginative inspiration of her own spirit.

But although Mrs. Cray could for a while hold John in control, the part she played was, she knew destined to failure. On this failure she did not let her mind dwell but was content to accept unquestioning the serene and happy moments of the present. John also thought little

of the future. The relation developed regardless of his consciousness, though sometimes when alone he cherished the hope of making her a home where she could rest from travelling and find tranquillity.

When one day at their midday meal Cray announced that they would be sailing in a couple of weeks, the knowledge came with a sharp stab. John realized that opportunities of spending long and happy evenings with Mrs. Cray would be over. He also remembered that at Kaimera he would probably have no further excuse for remaining in her company. Cray had talked lightly of, perhaps, taking him on as far as Albany, but this was very vague; and even if he went south with them, it would only put off the moment of separation for a short time. John watched to see how Mrs. Cray would take the news, but she carefully avoided his glance. After the meal he went away for a solitary walk full of his thoughts, feeling that whatever happened he could never let her go out of his life. After walking for some time, turning over in his mind all possibilities, he found but one conclusion: without her he could not live. Of that he was sure. Everything must now be put to the test.

That evening when they met he was resolute to determine his fate. At first sight of him she knew that he was charged with purpose, felt her heart leap in response, though there was regret there also, that the smooth measure of their friendship could not last. From perverseness and from latent fear she offered to read as usual. He refused with brief words, and for a while they sat side by side in silence.

Their meeting-place, one where they had often sat talking or reading together, was a grove of Morton figs near

the round of a cliff's top. Beneath the dark leaves they were now in shadow, though they faced westward towards the setting sun. The low hanging boughs cut them off from the direct rays, but the sun's reflection from the sea was flung bright on their faces. Inside the tent of the branches there was wide room since the ground was bare of all luxuriant growth, the hard soil supporting only short grass and close-grown moss.

When she was thus silent in expectancy, John found speech very difficult. All her superiority of education and birth was then upon her side. John was humbled and abashed.

"In two weeks, he says, we are going to start south," he began at last.

"Yes."

There was not much help in the response. John wondered how he could bridge the distance that they were apart. Could he have courage to call her by her name, a thing he had never done. It would sound, he thought, absurd and decided against it. Then quite simply he found expression of his most dominant thought: "I can't bear to be separated from you." Some little wince of emotion that she gave supplied the courage that he needed, and words came now with a rush. "I can't lose you after this. I want you to come away with me—leave him. I will make you a home. You have not been happy. I will make you happy."

Abruptly he paused. She did not speak, did not even turn towards him, though he knew now that she was not hostile. "We must tell him," he went on. "He will not want to keep you if he has lost your love; then when we get south we can go away together." As an after-

thought, and as a concession to what he imagined the practical needs of the world, "I know I haven't much money, but I can make it I'm sure."

She turned to him now very serious. "Don't say anything to him, John. He'd never let me go I know."

"But if you don't love him he won't want to keep you with him against your will."

"No, don't say anything. You don't understand. Men aren't like that." Then letting her glance rest on the distant ripples of the sea, "John, you don't know what you are asking. It's such a risk. I knew, of course, that you had been thinking this, and have been afraid. I'm so much older than you, and although I have money you'd want money of your own, and you don't know how difficult it is to get. You know nothing of the world."

"I know that I know nothing," said John with passionate warmth, "except that I cannot let you go away from me. I know that you are unhappy and that you could be happy with me. We could make a home — go anywhere, anywhere you liked."

Touched by his enthusiasm she looked almost forlornly at him. "But oh, John, I'm so dreadfully much older than you are."

"No, not much. I'm nineteen and you look as young. Twenty-eight isn't so much difference. It's nothing, why think about age?"

"But when you are thirty — just a young man beginning life — I shall be forty, a dreadful age."

"You won't be. You'll grow younger than I am, and it's eleven years to then. Age won't matter with a home and children. My father and mother are much older, and they are happy."

Very tenderly she now looked at him. "Do you want children? Why; you are such a child yourself."

"Yes, I want your children. You will forget my being so young when you have real children of your own."

Her eyes suddenly brimmed with tears, and putting out a hand she pulled him towards her, while her face puckered curiously with emotion. "Kiss me," she whispered. "Hold me close to you — closer."

The ardour of his youth she returned with kisses so passionate that he was bewildered with joy. All restraint was gone; body and soul were close and pulsing to his own. In her eyes was all her love. Through them he could see that her soul was opening to receive all the hope of his desires. When the flood of her emotion was spent she lay still in his embrace, then stiffened herself. "Let me go! Let me go!" Very gently he now touched her, afraid that by his roughness he might have hurt some delicacy in her nature. For a moment she lay, looking at him with tears running down her cheeks, then, turning over and hiding her face in the grass, she wept. Long sobs shook her body, as if her sorrow was too great to be contained therein and must tear itself free. Slowly they subsided, and she lay almost motionless, a pale figure in the dark twilight under the leaves. John was awed and a little frightened, begging her to forgive him if unwittingly he had hurt her. For answer she clasped her fingers upon his hand, holding it very tight.

II

On the short days that remained before the sailing, Mrs. Cray and John met morning and evening. In these times of mutual worship and happiness hope conquered.

The future was a world flooded with rose-coloured sunshine, open to discovery, and even Mrs. Cray was able, before the blaze of John's enthusiasm, to banish those stupid prudences which from time to time flitted across her brain.

The one flaw in John's happiness was that he was not allowed to tell Cray. He wished to have things open, seeing no reason to prevent a dignified parting. Surely Cray, who was so reasonable in all things, would not oppose their happiness nor wish to keep in bondage one who no longer loved him. But on this point Mrs. Cray was very definite, making him promise to say no word. Her husband would never let her go, she said. Too much of the past would bind them. A break against her husband's will would not be possible; he would never let her go. She told John that since they were now pledged to one another they had better leave secretly when they reached the mainland. Cray would not follow, he would be too proud. She did not think he would miss her much when she was gone, he would always have his own interests, but an open break was not to be thought of. In time he might perhaps forgive them; he was generous, that she fully endorsed, but it would be quite impossible to go away with John openly. The very idea made her smile.

What the world would think of so unusual a venture did not disturb her often. Her world was far away. The colonials they would live among would know nothing of their past. They would pass as an ordinary couple. She was still young, ready to start life and face hardships. John would grow into a man and would succeed. With him a normal life would open out; a home and children, and oh! she believed, a rich contentment. The very

prospect of escape from Cray's cold intelligence warmed her. As for money, she had enough in her own right to keep them safe.

So through hours of happiness the dream grew in form and colour. Each day brought them nearer to each other. John grew older, more of a man, and she deferring to his lead became younger. Many hours of freedom they spent together, yet remained unmated. The tenderness of his love ruled his passion. He wanted her free, himself to be free also, his own master.

III

The pearl-fishing came to an end with the exhaustion of the shallow-water beds, and the last days on the island were spent in leisurely striking camp and in general relaxation. Cray alone continued to work hard. These extra days he was staying on for the purpose of completing his study of the natives. Early and late he was at his notes, spending long hours of each day in the native camp. He seemed oblivious of all but the deep secrets of Totemism and class-marriage.

During this time of comparative idleness Peter Trigg made progress towards the attainment of his desire. Julep gradually fell under his influence, imbibing some of his hostility towards Cray. The separate camp that they made with their black girls and Bella was so different in atmosphere and conversation from the camp on the headland that they came to look upon the other with resentment. If they were satisfied with such unadorned simplicity it was snobbish of Cray to live by other standards.

Trigg was careful to propound no plan as yet; there

was merely an open understanding that he and Julep were to have a good share in the pearls. He hinted that those in the safe might fall to their portion, leaving Cray with his cutters-hold of shell. This much alone was definite that at Kaimera, or earlier, they must slip off with their takings and strike inland far from pursuit. About that they need not be very anxious, Trigg remarking that any fuss made would show Cray up for breaking the law in the first place.

Meanwhile a double game had to be played with Bella. Trigg pretended that he and Julep were going separately in his canoe and could take her with them. This kept her quiet and obedient to his wishes. His true intention was to give her over to certain blacks, paying them with his canoe for keeping her quiet when *The Venture* sailed. Such primitive children of nature as Bella and Julep were easily managed, indeed they assisted him by being so much occupied with each other. He was confident of success.

Tea-cup alone was suspicious always. He hated Trigg, who, well aware of his hatred, returned it with contempt, never losing an opportunity of administering hit or kick.

IV

As time drew near for departure John and Mrs. Cray, in spite of being filled with eagerness for the future, felt regret at leaving scenes where such happiness had, as it were, shyly against its will, revealed itself. There were the places where they had met, rich with significance of their progress. To bid farewell to these was, in a way, a gladness, for they knew that nothing can ever be repeated.

Life was too strong for them to value the past for its own sake, yet the past had led to the present, and for that they were grateful. On the last day they both wished to say farewell to the island together.

Instead of going to the dark grove of fig-trees — their usual meeting-place — they set out to climb to the highest point of the central range. Their way led at first among guava bushes and through long grasses, which arched above their heads. John went first, striking a path out with a stick. Mrs. Cray followed, stooping under the grasses, not speaking, but enjoying the silence and their solitude together. Once they stopped and laughed to one another while John brushed the sweat out of his eyes. As they reached higher ground, the grass gave place to dark-leaved jungle-undergrowth. Here they were glad to rest in the shade for a while. Higher up near the summit they came to grass again, this time not so tall, though reaching waist-high, and covering the curved domes of the hills like a garment.

At the top they halted. John had been helping her up the steep slope, and still held her hand. Beneath them the island lay silent as if gently breathing in the warm sunlight. Every tint was there, from the deep blue-black of forest trees to the palest yellow of dry sand-dunes. Like a live creature eternally still, waiting crouched, intent, full of purpose, or in other places sprawling negligently, but always motionless, the land, alive and warm, seemed to wait on some command, or perhaps only on its own whim, for the moment when it should rouse and shake itself, sending the trees scattering before its strength. Yet the moments passed, and it remained silent, without a twitch or a tremor, too heavy for even its vast fecundity to

stir. In front of them, whichever way they looked, was the ocean, dead blue, opaque, climbing to the steep of the horizon. To the east far distant was a broken arc of islands, high hill-tops which inclosed the waters between, as a frame some mirror whose surface age has deadened, making dim the fleeting, half-seen reflections. Such intimations of nascent forms glimmered over the dull weight of the sea, as puffs of wind stirred the calm of its surface. Elsewhere, scattered to north and south, were other islands, floating lightly on the water, casting faint shadows.

They gazed for a while without speaking, thrilled and alive with the beauty of the scene. John at last broke the silence. "What a wonderful place the world is," he said with heartfelt reverence, "and how beautiful."

"Yes, I have never known how beautiful till now. I am so glad of you, that I am afraid. Don't let us look for too long. It is perfect. Let us go lower down and rest in the shade."

He understood her mood, though was rather inclined to smile at her fear while pitying it, knowing how much she had been disappointed.

"I could stay here for hours and watch the sun set," he answered. "Let us go down to the shade a little way and then climb up again later."

Lower down under the trees they sat and talked. After a while they came to realize that this would be their last opportunity of undisturbed conversation until that hoped-for time when they would be free together. It was now that they must make all their plans.

"John, I want us to go south. I don't want to live here in the tropics. In the south there are wonderful forests, cool, with huge ferns and tree-stems twenty feet wide

and ever so tall. Near Kaimera it is all baked sand and such ugly white people. Up here it is too hot and no place to live. Let us go south."

"Where to?" he asked.

"Down near Hastytown or on the Marget river. We stopped there coming up, it was beautiful. We can get steamer from Kaimera to Leith and then go by train and coach."

"Yes, we must leave at Kaimera, if not before," he said thoughtfully.

She carried on the thought, planning their escape.

"Our first stop will be to take Tea-cup back. But there the natives would soon know all about us. We must go at Kaimera or before; before if possible, where you are not known."

He broke in. "I do wish we could tell your husband!"

"But, John, I know it would then be impossible, he would never let me go."

"We could go in spite of him, he couldn't actually prevent us."

For a moment she looked distressed, then said with a smile, "Yes, I could come now, I know. I would go with you anywhere. But if we told him there'd be a scene; he'd be sarcastic. I would go with you, but don't make it too hard."

"It makes me feel mean, this concealment," complained John.

"I know, but it can't be helped, the other is worse. We will write explaining everything. It will not be so hard for him that way. His vanity will be hurt. But, John! I've had years of him. I can't go back to it after this. I want life too. He never let me live ——" She

broke off for a moment in distress, then: "It's bad enough to think how his pride will take it when he finds we are gone, but I couldn't face the agony before. . . . Yes, I could if it was necessary. Help me at first. For so long I've lived just following him, shut off. . . ."

He looked puzzled, half understanding. "Why didn't you leave him?"

"I haven't courage for that kind of thing."

"Not for attacking things?"

"No." She shook her head sorrowfully. "I hate scenes."

"When you are free you will be happy and get brave."

She smiled, part in encouragement of herself, part at his boyish seriousness. Then breaking the thread of their discourse with a return to the practical: "Once on board, we had better not talk much together, or try to talk. It will be better so. I hate whispers; small concealments are vulgar. And when Tea-cup goes ashore we will not land; the natives watch everything. Near Kaimera we will go. We must be very sensible not romantic; if he stops at some little station we will land there and wait till he has gone, then take ship southward."

John flushed with happiness at the thought of the voyage together. "Of course there may be some difficulty about getting off, but we will manage it. I know we shall. Leave all that to me. You can be confident — we shall succeed." His eyes were bright with enthusiasm as he looked at her.

Very seriously she looked back. "Yes, we shall succeed. At first I had so many doubts, now I am confident. This is not madness as the world would think it. It is the beginning of sanity. That sterile, barren life was not

life — this is the beginning. You are my man; I am your woman. I have never before meant anything so seriously as I mean this. I will go with you anywhere you wish. You are my husband." Her face was white with emotion, and John was silent with reverence for the sincere piety of her sudden declaration. Henceforward he could indeed be sure of her. He took her hand, holding it for a while without speaking, then said in almost a whisper, "I will love you always. You shall never have any regrets."

.
Before returning to camp they walked again to the summit of the curved grass-covered hill and from there watched the sun sink below the horizon. The ocean had now changed from dead blue to live crimsons and yellows, streaked and bordered by ribands of green. The hills to the eastward had disappeared in mist, and the scattered islands on the west now appeared as solid black rocks, part structure of the ocean-bed, which jutted up through the glassy water. The air was still, with scarce a breath. The only sound piercing the silence was the irregular and plaintive whistle of some bird in the jungle below.

v

Throughout the night, though fearful, as are all savages of solitude and darkness, Tea-cup remained alone in the jungle. The importance of his task, strengthened by love and hate, was so urgent that even the fears of darkness could be braved. In the midst of thick undergrowth he squatted close to the ground. In front of him, stuck endwise in the earth, was the hollowed out

thigh bone of a wallaby. Into the cavity of the bone he poured in an even voice a methodical and unceasing stream of curses. With face bent low, forehead lined with savage wrinkles, mouth open and lips writhing in the flood of his imprecation, he cursed his enemy, cursing every organ and fragment of his body from his crown to his finger-nails. His eyes were to go blind and burn him like coals, his tongue was to swell, his teeth were to fall out, his stomach was to get hard, his throat was to dry, his feet were to be eaten with lice, his toes were to canker, his bones were to ache, his heart was to burst, his kidneys were to wither, his skin was to be covered with sores, his brain be infected with madness. Then he cursed everything that his enemy should eat. Meat was to stick in his throat, bread was to burst his stomach, fish to become putrid between his lips, the flesh of birds to poison him, tea and milk to fill him with dropsy, whisky to drive him mad. Then he cursed everything that his enemy might touch. Trees were to bend their thorns against him, dogs were to bite him, snakes were to poison him, everything living was to turn against him for evil. When Tea-cup had come to the end of his imagination he went through the whole curse again from the beginning.

For more than two hours he sat over his bone, filling it with all evil imaginings. At last, when he considered that he had sufficient bad-magic accumulated, he very carefully tied a pair of shoes, that he had made of emus' feathers, upon his feet that his track might not be known. Cautiously he now made his way to Trigg's camp and as silently, as only a native can, made his way among the sleeping women. To his anger and surprise Trigg was not there. On this discovery Tea-cup paused for a mo-

ment uncertain, then placed the bone under Trigg's pillow. After that he vanished again into the bush.

Having done thus far all that was in his power against his enemy, his duty now was to see what that enemy was about. He guessed that Trigg might be at the place where his own black-fellows slept, and set off in that direction. In this surmise he was correct. At the camp a small fire was burning, and round about it sat Trigg and three of the older men of his party. They spoke in native, and Tea-cup listened unobserved. He heard Trigg arrange that two of them should catch Bella, gag her, and carry her off into the bush. In the morning, he said, he was going away with the other white men in the cutter. He would be away on a short journey, and while he was away they could have the use of his canoe. They were not to let Bella follow him or make any noise. If they let her escape he would come back very angry and kill them. All this Tea-cup heard, but it didn't much interest him. Trigg's dealings with his women might be shady, but for that particular half-caste girl he had no thoughts and certainly no sentiments concerning fair play. Trigg went on to say that he would bring Bella to where the blacks would be waiting for her early in the morning, and that then he would go down to the boat and sail away. They were to make sure of catching her, remembering that she was quick, and again he added, "See that she makes no noise."

Although in all this talk Tea-cup had heard nothing that threatened Cray, he now suspected Trigg more than ever. He saw him as a ruthless scoundrel, one against whom his master must be warned before it was too late. Again he made off through the bush, arriving at Cray's

camp just as dawn was breaking. Silently he entered the tent and timidly touched Cray's foot. Cray opened his eyes, awake at once. Tea-cup put his fingers on his lips, signalling to be silent, then backed out of the tent.

Cray got out of bed, then followed, amused and wondering. "Well, what is it?" he asked when they were outside.

"That one Trigg bad fellow, damn bad fellow," began Tea-cup.

"Yes."

"Bad fellow! We go along o' *Venture*. Leave him stay here."

Cray smiled at the simple plan. "But I've said I'll take him with me."

"No matter, him bad fellow, better stay here."

"All right, Tea-cup. I'll watch him. I know he's up to something. You watch him too." Then laughing, "We two plenty good enough for fellow like Trigg."

Tea-cup grinned. "By and by I go away."

"Yes, then I can look after him by myself. I'm not frightened fellow. By and by Trigg frightened fellow, I think."

Tea-cup continued to grin. He was assured that his master was, at any rate, conscious of possible danger. Cray was amused, very confident. "Good thing you wake me early, Tea-cup. Plenty much to do. You help me pack my bed, pull down tent."

Together they set about striking camp, both in good humour over their morning's confidence.

VI

Both at the camp on the promontory and the camp further inland there was great stir. The natives buzzed round in swarms anxious for pickings. Cray gave many presents with an unusual generosity, and Trigg and Julep also disposed of all the small things that now they would no longer need. At the last, when it came to bidding farewell, the black women parted from their lords and masters very philosophically. John noticed that Bella was nowhere to be seen, and rather wondered what had become of her. He was, however, so occupied with his own schemes that the thought was only in his mind for a few moments. It was recalled when, an hour later, well out to sea, he chanced to overhear a fragment of conversation. Trigg had remarked that he took good care not to have melodrama with the girl swimming out after the boat or making a damned noise. Julep had merely spat into the sea rather emphatically, and said, "Poor little beast," though his whole attitude and expression showed for a moment a certain commiseration. This was the last mention that was made of Bella, and it was not to be supposed that any one would be much concerned as to her fate.

Once at sea, *The Venture* headed southwest, homewards, towards Garlip. The journey which, on the way out, had been so full of detours, was now the directest line. Cray wished to make all speed, since he had left the season late, and was afraid of being caught in a Willy-Willy. The wind was variable from the east, so that they had to beat, but were usually able to make a long run on the port tack.

The change of life from land to sea affected all on board. The close quarters and the wide stretch of monotonous sea induced a restlessness. The like conditions of the voyage out also emphasized the different mental atmosphere that now prevailed. There was only the show of open comradeship, each individual living an intense and intimate life in his own thoughts. Cray deeply regretted that it had ever been his luck for him to fall in with Trigg, but he was confident that he had the situation in hand. He was fairly sure that Trigg was up to some villainy and that he had been successful in estranging Julep. John he could rely on if he needed help, but feeling quite competent to deal with the matter on his own account he made no mention of it. About Julep he was worried, for he disliked treachery. Here he was willing to act leniently, believing that Julep had been led almost against his will by Trigg's stronger personality. For the present he was content to watch and wait. In the meanwhile he could give Trigg no advantage and decided not to land at Garlip, but merely to put Tea-cup ashore in the dinghy. He guessed that things would be likely to come to a head near Kaimera, where he would have to be careful, since he did not wish to have any fuss in the port itself. The more completely Trigg were worsted the keener would he be to turn informer. It would be best, Cray thought, to put in some twelve miles to the north, this would be within tempting walking distance, and the situation would be likely to develop. Should nothing happen, he would land Trigg a little further up the coast, then run for Kaimera before any information could be given. This plan, so simple and effective, did not much occupy his mind, and such

times as he was not directing the course of the boat, he sat in the cabin writing up his notes on the aborigines.

Julep's mind was by no means so untroubled. He was uncomfortable about the agreement with Trigg. Still, he had pledged himself. Some of the pearls were his, and, considering how hard he had worked, he thought himself entitled certainly to more than a tenth. Before they set sail he had tried to extract from Trigg some details of his plans, but all he could hear was that if they stopped near any settlement Trigg would manage to get hold of some of the pearls, and that then they would get clear of the cutter and make away inland.

As to John and Mrs. Cray, they were oblivious to all thoughts that did not concern each other. At the first opportunity they too would make their escape. That event loomed as all-important. The very imagining of so critical a time making them breathe quick in hope and fear.

At Garlip Tea-cup was landed, Cray sending him back to his fellow-tribesmen laden with presents of tobacco, pipes, blankets, cloth, everything that a native's heart can desire. There was more than he could carry at once, a dinghy full of his possessions, including an English knife, most cherished of all. His delight was beyond expression, and at bidding farewell he wept tears of both joy and grief. Cray, in his own dignified way, shared a reflection of this pleasure. It was pleasant to appear as a generous deity. He had a conscious pride in his actions, and those mortals who ministered to his greatness he rewarded adequately.

Of all this Trigg was openly scornful. He hated Cray for his damned superior ways. What need, he thought,

to make such a fuss over a savage, a damned smelly black man, who should have been kicked and kept in his place. He regretted that he couldn't give Tea-cup a parting jab with a marlinespike, make him grin after another fashion. As it was, he could only express by silence and his general attitude of bored contempt the scorn he felt for such sentimental nonsense. He was glad though to see the last of the black, for he knew now he was free of an enemy quicker of sight and hearing than he was himself; an enemy too who would think as little of murder if the occasion should offer.

After leaving Garlip, *The Venture* stood well out to sea, making a line for the North-West Cape. Land was soon left behind, and on all sides blue sparkling waves rose and fell, passing on with careless indifference to the tight-stretched motives which grew always more intense in the small confines of the cutter. In so limited a space private conversation between two people was only possible on rare occasions, then perhaps words might be hurriedly spoken; but for the most part few confidences were exchanged. They all waited with silent expectancy the next landing.

Mrs. Cray and John had no suspicion of Trigg and Julep. They thought only of their own adventure, having no idea that there grew up another plot parallel with their own. The daily sight of Mrs. Cray was for John sufficient recompense for the enforced silence. Her quiet dignity of manner, the soft yet firm quality of her personality, the trust he had in her, and the thought that by some rare fortune he was able to bring happiness to her life filled him with such feeling of warmth and courage that no ordeal seemed too hard to be suffered. That

he could feel that she was glad of him was itself a joy more great than he had ever imagined. Their silent intercourse — a glance sometimes, or merely the unspoken praise and thanksgiving for her near presence — was a sufficient delight. He loved their silences, holding them as trembling, eager birds captive in his hands, which in so short a while would be loosed to fly straight up to heaven, lit with all the radiance of a morning sun.

Of the others he had little thought. They also were oblivious to his life, intent on their own interests. Cray had kept his doubts to himself, but watched Trigg narrowly. Concerning his wife he had no suspicions. Certainly, he had noticed that there was something strange about her manner, but this he put down to the heat and perhaps a weariness of the island and sea life. He decided that he would take her to Paris for some months, perhaps spend the northern summer at Fontainebleau. John too was somewhat altered. Cray guessed that it might be excitement at the prospect of so soon returning to the mainland. Any suspicions that he might have concerning Trigg he was not going to let worry him. The ideal freshness of the journey south was unspoilt. He alone of all on board fully enjoyed all the small emergencies of the voyage. This wonderful movement over the globe — the leaving of one place still full of interest to find another yet more interesting — was what his soul loved. Every day and every hour of the day the ocean, seemingly the same, was varied with slight changes. The colours changed with the changing sky, and a different saltiness was in the breeze. Each day, after taking his bearings, when he pricked off his position on the chart, it gave him pleasure. It gave an intimacy, a familiarity

with earth and sea. Plans he made only of the broadest outlines; he seldom anticipated details, confident in the future. Now he was content to wait, feeling that when the occasion came he would be able to meet Trigg with strategy better than his own.

After they had turned the North-West Cape he steered southward, hugging the land. He now began to watch Trigg closely, feeling sure that the fellow was up to something. It was at this time that he discovered that Trigg hated him. There was no doubt about the hatred, now that he had once seen it. It was of the kind that would not stop at murder. A thrill of excitement gave him a pleasant feeling of anticipation for their coming contest. Yes, he would lie up twelve or fifteen miles north of Kaimera, and then wait developments.

After ten days' sailing from Garlip they sighted Cape Cuvier, and knew that they could make Kaimera that evening. With the knowledge that they were so near their destination there burnt up an intense excitement which they each endeavoured to conceal. Mrs. Cray felt the sudden strain more than any of the others, and although she kept absolute control she had a look as if her spirit were almost burnt out and smothered under the rigid mask of her passivity. Once she had time to whisper to John that he must be very careful as she had noticed that her husband suspected something.

When Cray announced that he was going to lie up for the night and not going to enter Kaimera till the morning all hearts beat faster. This was just what they had hoped. It had always seemed possible that he would prefer to wait till the morning, but none of them had dared to build on it. Now surety had suddenly come.

John and Mrs. Cray dared not meet each other's eyes, hardly dared speak for fear of betraying the emotion of their hearts.

As *The Venture* ran in towards a small bay there appeared far away to the north a line of smoke. This grew larger, and they could soon make out the lines of one of the coastwise passenger steamers that plied between Singapore and Leith. Any doubts that Trigg had about taking action were banished. He would get the pearls that night, and at the same time make sure that he was never bothered by any pursuit. He would then make for Kaimera, catch the steamer that, he knew, would sail at dawn. As for Julep, he would settle with him later; that would not be a difficult task.

The distant steamer on her voyage southward brought to John and Mrs. Cray the same thought of flight. Providence was indeed being kind. John found opportunity to whisper that he would manage their escape that night. She looked fearfully at him, but showed by her look that she was willing to follow where he should lead.

VII

When the sails had been furled and *The Venture* lay close to the land there was a general feeling of expectation. They were all disappointed when Cray made no preparation for going ashore. "Are you going to land?" asked John, showing his surprise.

"No, why should I? I shall land at Kaimera tomorrow morning."

"I thought after so long at sea ——" John ventured.

"You can land if you want to stretch your legs." said

Cray cheerfully. "There's no point in it, but you can do as you like."

This indeed made things difficult; John had counted on a general landing as was usual, then escape could have been easy. However, he was screwed to the pitch now, meaning to join the steamer at whatever price. He saw that by pretending that he wanted to go ashore he could at any rate get the dinghy unshipped and into the water. "Very well, I'll go," he said as he began to loosen the ropes that held the dinghey. He didn't dare risk the suggestion that Mrs. Cray should come with him.

His expedition was not a long one, but was of this much service that he found the ground behind the sand-hills was not very rough or broken, also that there was a lightly marked track leading towards Kaimera. Once ashore together, then all would be easy. When he returned to *The Venture* he fastened the dinghy, letting her float astern.

That night, as if by common, unspoken consent, they all turned in early. It was dark and calm. The boat lay very still. John had pulled his bed far forward into the bows, taking the place that Tea-cup used to occupy. Forward of the mast Trigg and Julep lay wrapped in their blankets, one on either side of the small cook-house. Aft of the mast was the cabin roof which, standing two and a half feet high, cut off the view of the poop. Aft, on each side of the companion-way, Cray and Mrs. Cray lay in their hammocks, which were hung between the mainstays and the bows. Between, the boom and the sag of the furled sail cut them off, to some extent, from each other's view. Cray's hammock was to port, Mrs. Cray's to starboard. For two hours all lay very still.

No one slept, each waited till the others should be asleep.

Cray was the first to move. Very silently he got out of his hammock, then carefully arranged his pillows and rugs to appear as if he was still lying there. Like an indistinct shadow in the darkness he went to the companion-way, and then down into the cabin. Mrs. Cray saw him move, and her mouth became dry with excitement. It was now too late to warn John. She was terrified that her husband suspected everything. The three men forward had heard not a sound. They still waited, listening under the silence of the night.

In the cabin Cray unlocked a drawer and took out his revolver. He did not expect to have to use it. He hoped not, as violence was very distasteful to his educated senses but he had seen a look in Trigg's eyes, and meant to be prepared for all eventualities.

Up in the bows, close to the anchor-chain, John lay very still. He was not going to spoil things by being in a hurry. He would wait till they were all asleep. It was a clear night, dark without a moon. He lay looking up at the innumerable stars. The promise of life was very big, and his heart beat strongly against his ribs with love and hope. The world, the whole universe, was even more beautiful than it had appeared to his earlier youth on Kanna Island. Adventure, romance, success, all were to be his. He loved everything, the stars so distant and remote equally with the tiny waves that plashed against the bows close to his head. In the immediate crisis he believed in his fortune. What accidents could stand against such love as theirs? She had told him that she loved him, had pledged herself with no uncertain breath to follow wherever he should lead. He had never asked

for that assurance, it was her own spontaneous gift, making him doubly sure. He could even now feel her heart beat in warm response to his own. Now surely they were all asleep. Very silently he climbed over the star-board bow, lowering himself into the water. He kept on trousers and shirt, and had to be very careful lest the bubbles should betray him. The water was cool and delicious. He swam silently with slow deliberate strokes towards the dinghy. Mrs. Cray alone heard the swirl of the water as he passed.

A few seconds after John had climbed over the bows, Trigg and Julep had exchanged whispers. They had not seen him, nor had they any suspicion of his movements, but they also felt that the moment had come when all the others must be asleep. Trigg's commands were short and imperative. For the work he had to do he wanted Julep out of the way. After a moment's whispering Julep, who was on the port side, lowered himself over the bulwark into the water. He was not quite so careful about the bubbles in his clothes as John had been, and both Cray and Mrs. Cray heard a faint sound. By this time John was beside the dinghy and heard nothing. It was his intention to get Mrs. Cray into the dinghy but to remain in the water himself, pushing it silently to the shore.

When Julep was overboard working his way down the side of the boat, Trigg pulled out from among his blankets a heavy marlinespike, then crossing to port he crept along behind the cabin roof towards Cray's hammock.

As soon as he came to the corner by the companion-way Mrs. Cray saw him. Trembling with fear now, she lay still. No idea of his motive had entered her head.

She felt that his action was all somehow connected with her intended flight. Slowly Trigg stood upright, looking round with fierce, eager eyes. Everything was still. His lithe taut figure seemed strung to savage harmony with the malicious and suddenly revealed cruelty of the night. The wavelets even, plashing against the side of the boat, now sounded hollow and cold.

Julep, making every effort to be silent, worked his way along the cutter's side. When he came to the stern he was surprised, and, in his present nervous state, terrified to see the dinghy coming towards him stern first impelled by some invisible force. Entirely thrown off his mental balance, he retreated to wait events.

On deck Trigg, bending his head like some suspicious and wary animal, peered across the deck at Mrs. Cray, then coming a step forward raised the marlinespike with terrible swiftness, bringing it down a smashing blow on the pillow, on which he supposed Cray's head to be resting. The hammock sprang into the air with a switching rebound. In its unexpected and senseless activity there was something intensely mocking. From that one outrageous and insulting bound it subsided to feverish jerks, a few petulant trembles, then again all was silent. Mrs. Cray had leapt up in her hammock and now sat bolt upright, looking at Trigg with wide-open, terrified eyes.

Neither made any sound; she had uttered no scream, not even an oath had escaped him. In silence they regarded each other. Trigg under his immobility was mad with rage. He would kill, kill, kill, damn them he was not going to be tricked like that. Mrs. Cray was rigid in her fixed position, pale, her senses stunned by the awfulness of his intent. Into the silence John's

whisper came from the water, eager with expectation "Come quick, I have the dinghy." She made no answer. "Come," he repeated. "Can you hear?"

Trigg, his face now convulsed with rage, made a quick step, and leaning forward over the boom, raised the marlinespike. Mrs. Cray uttered a faint scream as she put up her hands against the blow. The sharp crash of a revolver shot rang out. Trigg's taut figure became convulsed, he tottered, choked and fell. The marlinespike dropped from his hand, falling close beside Mrs. Cray.

In the companion-way Cray stood, revolver in hand. His composure had for once left him. "The black-guard! Did he hurt you?" he cried.

She was very pale, but held her composure with iron fortitude. "No! Oh, Arthur!" she gasped.

With a step he was by her side. She clasped his arm. On the deck Trigg gave a long gasp, then stretched and lay still. Cray, now gaining control over his first wild excitement, bent over him. "He's dead, I think. I had to make sure, he was so close to you . . . a bullet clean through his head." He spoke now as if apologizing for his violence. "I never thought that he'd strike at you. . . . I didn't want to shoot, that's why I waited. There was nothing else to be done." Then recollecting. "Where's Julep? John!" he shouted.

From either side of the boat they answered him, and began to climb up over the bulwarks. Both wondered at the shot, each was filled with his own misgivings. At so strange an appearance Cray's anger blazed up. "What the hell are you doing there? Julep, Sherwin, are you both in it?" Then to his wife, "Get my lanthorn from the cabin, quick."

"In what?" asked John as he pulled himself up by a stay and stood upright.

"You should know better than I do! Some damned rascality. Trigg tried to murder me in my sleep, then nearly killed my wife, would have done if I hadn't shot him."

"Trigg tried to kill her?" said John incredulously with a convincing astonishment. "No, I know nothing of that, but——"

Abruptly Cray turned to Julep. "What do you know of it all?"

"By God, I never thought he meant murder, that I swear."

"You knew there was some scheme afoot, and you were in it," said Cray now more calmly.

Julep was silent. His wet clothes dripped upon the deck. Mrs. Cray by now had returned with the lanthorn, which she placed on the cabin roof. She was trembling and pale. Wrapped in a white dressing-gown, she stood close to the companion-way in the full light. Her hair hung in two long plaits on either side of her neck, reaching to her waist. Cray, very tall in his white sleeping-suit, stood near the stern. At his feet lay Trigg's lifeless body, the head resting in a dark pool of blood. Cray continued his questions. "What were you doing in the water?"

Julep spoke quickly, muttering his words with his eyes on the deck. "I was after the dinghy. He said he'd slip into the cabin for the pearls. I had no thought of murder, that I swear. For God, I wish I'd never listened to him."

"And you, John, what were you doing?"

"I — I know nothing of all this, but I was going to deceive you too. I'm glad I can talk now. I wanted to." His voice was trembling and dry with emotion, though full of boyish enthusiasm. As he spoke he gained confidence. "I — your wife — we were going away together. We love one another. I wanted to tell you. Now we can go without deception."

"What were you doing in the water?"

"I was getting the dinghy."

Cray laughed a hard, broken laugh, then to his wife: "What have you to say?"

Mrs. Cray's eyes were fixed on the deck. Her head was bowed. "I am ashamed," she said without looking up.

With a fierce pang of pain that made his cheeks tingle and shrivel, the words pierced John's heart. The next instant he knew that he had mistaken her sense; she was merely ashamed of their deception.

Cray looked at her with a shadow of perplexity visible in his eyes, then with quick anger to Julep, "I shall put you ashore. I can't have people I can't trust near me. . . . Go forward, get your things together. Go to the forecastle. Stay there till I call you." Mrs. Cray winced as though the words had been flung at her. Julep went forward muttering to himself.

When he had gone, Cray came a step nearer to John.

"Now tell me," he said.

"I have told you. We are going away. We love one another. You would not wish to keep her against her will. I wanted to tell you before but she was afraid. *Now* you must know."

"You will make her a home I suppose from out of

your great experience of life? Is that what you've arranged?"

John was stung by the crude sarcasm. "Yes, I can learn and shall succeed. I shall make a better home than you have ever made for her," he answered defiantly. "She has been unhappy for years. You know nothing of her; hardly notice her existence."

Mrs. Cray broke in. "Oh, John, don't talk any more, don't talk."

"I must. He must hear why we are going."

She flashed at him one glance. "That was all a mistake. Oh!"

Again that terrible stab of pain that made John feel old in face and heart. Where could his courage come from if she was against him? Why wouldn't she look at him? With her support he could manage everything, compel Cray to let her go. Was she indeed ashamed?

Cray looked from one to the other still a little puzzled, then he perceived that under the strain of the night's adventure something had snapped in his wife; that she was broken. He was sure of her now. His pride was safe. For all time she would be his, pledged irrevocably, could he but use his advantage. He saw that he could afford to be generous. "Your choice is free," he said with sarcasm still in his tone.

"Oh, I am ashamed! ashamed!" She stepped towards her husband, laying her head on his arm.

John's heart had gone black and small. Hope had died, with it his spirit had died also; it was but some dead ghost that spoke, still he must fight on. "Ashamed of what? All our hopes? All that we dreamed? All that you told me — where has that gone?"

She glanced at him warily. "That was nothing."

"Nothing!" The word was like the breaking of a heart. His brain had turned black now, like his heart. His head was empty, only one obstinate belief, that was no belief, persisted. There was some huge error. She was not against him, could not be. All her dear words of truth, her smiles, her tears could not be swept away! Then even the mocking ghost of hope vanished. She was against him. He was without courage, without strength. Yet he must fight on to taste all bitterness. Where was her self-possession, her gentle pride? To what could he appeal? "What has happened — why have you forgotten everything?"

The former incidents of the night were but as a shadow. Indeed they were all oblivious now of the dead man at their feet.

"I have remembered," she said, looking at him now with steady eyes. "I shall stay with my husband. We are man and wife. I had forgotten, and I — I *should* have loved you as a friend. You are so much younger, so much younger. You will meet some one your own age, some better woman whom you will marry. It is my fault. I should have known. I shall stay with my husband. It has been a mistake. You must forget me, forgive me if you can."

"It is no mistake. What difference does age make? You were unhappy, you lived shut up in yourself, but you were dying inside. With me you rediscovered life. All of our life was true — the other dead. That sterile, hopeless life you said."

Cray had been listening, all his keen intelligence awake, "Did you say that?" he asked.

She spoke to John now pitifully, almost pleading. "See how weak faith is in me — how old I am. You belong to another world. You must go. You must go."

At that moment Cray understood his wife. He had a vision of long years of solitude piled up against her, breaking her youth and spirit. He spoke now quite gently to John. "She has made her decision. You must go."

In the last struggle of a dying faith, a faith, however, that would never be quite dead, the youth cried, "Why do you throw away from you everything that we believed?"

The answer was not logical, but it had to John a terrible and perplexing conclusiveness, the finality of a monstrous and all-obscuring lie, a falsehood never to be forgiven. "I love my husband."

For a moment he was staggered by such a blasphemy of words, then he flashed at her, "If you did you wouldn't say so."

"Perhaps she will learn to," said Cray with a humility that sounded strange. They were all silent while several moments passed. Then Cray asked his wife, "Do you wish to say anything else?"

"No."

She turned, and with one look at John, into which at future times he could read all manner of fancies, she walked down the steps into the cabin.

Then John heard Cray shouting to Julep. All was vague about him, he was indifferent to what happened. The scenes that followed were always indistinct, as if they had happened in a dream.

"Julep, have you got your things ready?" Cray shouted.

"Yes."

"Go to the hold and fetch a couple of heavy shells."

John vaguely wondered what he wanted shells for. When Julep came Cray bent over the body. He took the shells from Julep and put them in the dead man's pockets. Then he stuck the marlinespike through his belt. "That ought to sink him," he said. "John, give me a hand." He bent, lifting Trigg's shoulders. John mechanically took hold of the feet. They dragged the body to the side. It seemed extraordinarily heavy. Then with a lurch they sent it overboard. An arm waved in the air, the water looked black and thick as very slowly the corpse sank. John felt his heart and all his youth go with it down into the cold blackness. Bubbles alone rose from out that obscurity. After that he was numb with misery, regardless of details. He was ordered with Julep to get into the dinghy. He remembered feeling it strange that he should sit in the stern and that Cray should scull. When they reached the land Cray backed in the boat stern first. He heard Cray ask, "Can you jump out now?" "Yes." Then he jumped out. It all seemed so much like an ordinary expedition; but the thought came that he would never see her again and that she was unhappy, having sustained some injury the nature of which he did not comprehend, but which was deep and crippling.

As he stood on the beach he could hear the sound of Cray's sculls getting more remote. Julep was saying something to him. "We better stay here till it's a bit light. It's so damned dark I can't see the way."

"On the other side of the sand-hills," said John, "out of sight."

In a hollow of the dunes they lay down to wait till the dawn. The earth was still warm from the day's sun. Above them the sky was thick with tiny glittering stars. The milky-way, like an ascending spire of smoke, swept across the heavens. Other stars shone bright and hard. For a while John gazed at them, then put his arm across his eyes to shut out their cold and pitiless indifference.

VIII

For a while John lay still with his arm pressed hard across his eyes. His finger-nails were gripped in the flesh of his shoulder, and, as his muscles tired, the action instead of becoming feebler became tighter and more savage. If by shutting out the faint light of the stars he could find in the immeasurable darkness oblivion from the pain of his new knowledge, then he were content to shut off life for always and to lie dead upon the sand-dunes. But, just as distorted and grotesque patterns grew under his dark eyelids, so new knowledge flickered and blazed in livid flames. Question followed question in useless, hopeless succession. There was no answer, yet there was always the same answer, inarticulate, finding no words for expression, vague and evasive, which like a burning cloud enveloped the world. Sometimes through physical tiredness he could relax a little, sinking with a vague gratefulness into the comparative calm of despair; then his pain would swoop again hungrily upon him, making his muscles taut, his whole frame to vibrate beneath the sharpness of its blows.

During the times of relaxation he began to argue with himself. How was it he had been so tame? This pain, had he then felt it, could impel him to anything. Why

had he let her go? He should not have taken her denial, for it was false. He had been as one stunned — stupid, silent, obedient. Why had he been so young, so unprepared?

In amongst these futile questions came curses and mutterings from Julep. Slowly John began to feel a slight interest and opened his eyes. He saw Julep not far distant and could discern his features in the twilight of early dawn. Julep looked back at him with a queer expression of self-depreciation.

"Well, we've made damned fools of ourselves," he said with a sour smile, "and the only consolation is that that blighter Trigg got his deserts. I lost all my share through him for nothing, and find myself a thieving scamp at the end of it."

"What were you doing?" asked John.

"We were going to sneak some of the pearls, but I never knew he was up to murder — the swine — Now I'm damned if I'm going to talk about it. It's bad enough to have taken the wrong side and be paid out." Then as John said nothing, "The Boss is all right. I've never served under a better man; and what's worst of all is having gone back on him. Thank God that blighter's dead; if he weren't — I'd do for him myself —"

After another pause he mused, "He's no coward either; he takes every risk. He leaves you and me here, a few miles from Kaimera, to give him away for taking the pearls and doing in that dud; but by God we're not that sort, and it's just something to think that he knows it."

John still made no answer, his interest in Julep had dropped and he had gone back to his own thoughts.

Julep regarded him with a certain surprise and a faint interest that any one should take a love-affair so hard. "And you made a pretty blimy fool of yourself," he said encouragingly; "why didn't you take a black girl as I told you, instead of messing about with a married woman?"

John felt a passing wave of anger, but somehow it was too irrelevant to his suffering to find expression. He remained still silent. Julep, seeing the drawn look on the boy's face, felt a genuine compassion. "Come, don't take it too hard," he said, "there are plenty of other women in the world — white ones, married too if you prefer 'em. Cheer up, they're as common as gooseberries and as easily picked, once you know the way."

The words were so unaccordant to John's thoughts that he hardly heard them, yet the communion with another human being and Julep's crude though well meaning sympathy worked in him strongly. Against his will two unexpected tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Come, John, cheer up," said Julep kindly. "You're so damned young, that's why you feel it. It's nothing when you're a bit older and know how to put things in their place. You know how it is with dogs. You've seen the old dog tied to his kennel, he's quiet and happy, while the puppy yelps all day and most of the night. It's just the same when the pup gets his first licking, most of his howling is due to surprise and outraged feelings. After a bit he gets used to it, just as he gets used to the chain. You can't get everything you want — but as you get older you can get a good deal if you go the right way about it."

John was touched by his kind intention, and answered

rather tragically, "But there is no one else like that."

"Lord bless you, yes," said Julep, thinking that the saneness of his philosophy was bound to tell, "hundreds of them. All the women are much the same. Put their heads in bags and you could hardly tell the difference. God made them all for the same good purpose, and they damned well know it."

John could almost feel a wan kind of amusement to think how little Julep could understand. He did not think it worth while to say anything. Julep, who took this silence as a sign of the youth's conversion to a sensible point of view, continued his discourse now not so much for John's enlightenment as for the gratification of hearing his own wisdom. "Yes, they are all the same, except that you get tired of some sooner than of others. No man can go on loving a woman any more than he can go on eating sweet cake, that's why women are always discontented. If you ask me, you were lucky to get off so easily. Had you never thought that you might be tired of her in three months' time? You'd have a change of fancy by then, besides she's ever so much older than you are, and you'd be put to it to know what to do with her, just when you were getting a taste for life. She'd be a lump round your neck."

John cut him short, raging at him. "You fool, don't speak of her, don't dare speak of her — damn you — damn you —" In his anger he had sprung to his feet and now stood over Julep, his eyes hard with rage. Then, as he saw in Julep's eyes a surprised and ruffled look of resistance, he knew that all his courage and hope were dead. He wished only to be away from this loathsome cynicism, to be alone where all his stricken faith could

wither and die without being defiled. He turned abruptly and walked with quick trembling steps away towards the low hills that stretched to eastward.

"All right, all right," expostulated Julep, "I didn't mean to say anything against her. Sit down, and don't be a fool." Then, as he saw John turning away towards the bush, "Come back, John, don't be a fool. Come back — Oh well, damn you, I'm not going to run after you." Then to himself, "What the hell's the matter with him? He'll get bushed as like as not." Again he shouted, but John, who was now some distance away, took no notice. "Well, I can't go running after him," thought Julep. "He can run a sight faster than I can." Then consoling himself, "He'll soon come to his senses when he gets hungry."



CHAPTER VI

THE TOWN

I

THE small, though flourishing, port of Ruperttown is the junction of the Northern line from Gould and the railways from the Lyell Goldfields; from Nallan, Mt. Gerard and Redsand. It does considerable shipping trade besides being the commercial centre and outlet to all towns and stations in the Lyell and Garloo districts. A long street, lined with shops and hotels, which runs parallel to the shore, is its chief feature. Beyond this street are rising sand-dunes with dwelling houses clustered upon their sides and summits, some of which are built in two or even three stories after the European pattern. Here and there are green enclosures of garden. To south of the town are low-lying stretches of sea-marsh from whence comes mosquitoes and sand-flies. Inland, are hills rising slowly towards Garloo.

The town of late years has been particularly prosperous. This prosperity is displayed by the imposing plate-glass windows of its few shops and by the record number of "drunks." There is a saying that there are more "drunks" in Ruperttown at nine in the morning than in any other town in the West at the same hour at night. By midday it is certainly the rule that every third man goes with an uncertain gait. This, considering that the

air is dry, the sun hot, money very cheap, and the inns and drinking-shops in adequate proportion to the town's prosperity is natural enough.

It was late evening when down the long street John Sherwin walked, with a quick, rather nervous step, looking about him from side to side. He had arrived by the steamer which had just come from Kaimera, and was one of the first of a crowd of passengers who now hurried ashore. John was dressed in new clothes of the ordinary pattern: blue dungarees, a blue shirt and a felt hat; over his shoulder he carried a bundle.

Since that time when he had walked away by himself leaving Julep alone upon the sand-dunes many small incidents had gone towards moulding the new channel into which his life should flow. At first he had just walked on aimlessly, anxious to be alone, then after a while he had become aware that he was very hungry, and still more thirsty. He had a thirst so great that it almost rivalled the suffering of his mind. His instinct for life, though it had been for a few moments broken and twisted, now recovered, and if for no other motive than to gratify his thirst he made as straight a course as he could for Kaimera.

About two miles north of the town he came on a dried-up river-bed, with here and there pools, banked by rushes, white gum-trees and thickets of red eucalyptus-bushes. He took deep draughts of the warm green water, then sat down to think. In spite of his misery which in no way grew less, but recurred with all its maddening questions and regrets, he knew that he must live. For what purpose he could not answer, since all hope was dead. But he must live — his instinct told him that — if

for no better reason than a savage vindictiveness against his own youthful idealism. After a while he came to notice that the river-bed where he sat was beautiful, just such a place where, with Mrs. Cray, he had been so often happy. There were tiny creepers growing amongst deep moss which stabbed him with remembrance, then there was all the tribe of insects, the buzz of wings, the singing of large yellow cicadas, for all of which she had her own fanciful, yet very adequate, names. With a kind of bitter self-hatred he wished no longer to see the reflections of his love, and so had trudged on towards the town.

On his way he turned over possible plans of action. The world was empty, there was no reason why he should stay at one place or go to another. The thought of perhaps visiting his people on Kanna Island came to him, but he put it aside with revulsion. He could not bear them to see him so utterly a failure. Then he thought that at Kaimera people might know him. Pomfrey might be there and he would be recognized. He would get away as soon as possible. His father he had heard talk of the gold-fields. By boat he could get to Ruperttown, then perhaps go inland.

In the evening when he reached Kaimera, he found that he needed money and remembered that at the bank there was fifty pounds that Cray had paid for his stingaree skins. When he had made his way to the flat-faced imposing-looking building he was surprised to find that Cray had left a letter for him that morning. With the letter was an enclosure of forty pounds for himself and a hundred pounds for Julep. He read with difficulty the small firm handwriting.

"To JOHN SHERWIN,

"The enclosed forty pounds are the wages due to you for the five months you have been with me. This is at the rate of two pounds a week which your services have fully justified. The hundred pounds in the enclosed envelope you will give to Julep; it should cover, for him, the expenses of this trip. You will be wise to keep the money banked till you have in view some sound investment.

"Yours, etc.,

"ARTHUR CRAY."

That was all, there was no message, no mention of the past. How indeed could there be? he questioned; yet he felt keen disappointment that Mrs. Cray should not have sent some word, some kindness, which would have taken away part of his bitterness. He felt reproach against her omission, hugging the cruel thought that all his love had been for her but a trivial mistake.

He became conscious that the people in the bank were watching him. Damn Cray and his talk of "sound investment." He would take out all the money and get away to Ruperttown as soon as possible; away from this cursed spot.

At the hotel he found Julep as he had expected, and handed him his money. Then he had gone off to the Coffee Palace where he preferred to lodge. He did not wish to hear Julep's unavailing regrets, his eulogies of Cray, or philosophical remarks about women.

The ten days that he had to wait for the next steamer he spent almost entirely by himself. He bought a new

outfit of clothes, so as not to be conspicuous. Most of each day he sat in his room gazing out to sea. He shrank from the idea of conversation, or even from being seen by other people. In his mind he was puzzling out the ethics of disillusionment. Slowly they sifted themselves clear of his pain. If the world was his enemy and the fairest hopes made of brittle stuff, then it were best to take firm grasp on suspicion. For hours he would brood, thinking about women. Mrs. Cray he would acquit from all general indictments — she was something apart, wonderful in herself, justifying all that she did; in him must have been the blame — but when he thought of women, other women as opposed to men, he believed them to be false and wanton. He did not actually admit this to himself, for he would still have repudiated Julep's philosophy, but this was the strong undercurrent of his feeling. His instinct for self-preservation would make him distrustful of them in future.

The voyage on the steamer had come as a relaxation. John had found that the sea was still blue in the light of sunshine, and his senses could take pleasure in a kind of apathetic contemplation of the moving water. This tranquillity, that he now felt, lay only on the surface. It was a superficial calm; underneath was a tumult of emotion of which his brain knew nothing. A wave, that from babyhood to childhood, to adolescence, had been sweeping steadily on had now been checked. It had impinged upon hard rocks, and deep down was raging in angry swirls soon to break the surface, beating it into foam and broken water.

Now that he had arrived in Ruperttown John's business was to look about for a lodging. The first large

hotel that he came to was "The Golden Sun." He paused for a moment a little shy of entering, then walked into the bar where some twenty men were drinking uproariously. He pushed his way through the throng to the counter. "Can you let me have a bed for the night?" he asked of the host, a spare man who somewhat reminded him of Peter Trigg.

"Have a bed? Yes. But you've come to the wrong door. Now you're here, you'll have a drink?"

A jolly-looking half-tipsy man struck John on the back. "Of course he'll have a drink. What shall it be, sonny?"

"No, thank you, I won't have any," said John.

"What, not have a drink? Gor blimy! What's the matter with the kid?"

"No, I want a bed," said John lamely.

"Well, you can go to bed when you've had a drink! What's to stop you?" said the man.

A well-looking, handsome girl with thick lips, pale cheeks and sleek black hair, who stood behind the bar leant across to John and said pleasantly: "Come, Mister, what will you 'ave? You must have something to oblige the gentleman. 'Ave a Scotch and soda."

"Very well, Scotch and soda," said John.

The stuff tasted horrible, reminding him of the smell of dead mice, but he gulped it down. The men watched him amused, seeing his distaste. "Well, how do you find it?" said one of them. "That's good whiskey that is; anyway, it's as good as you'll get in Ruperttown, unless you buy it in a bottle."

"Looks as if the last thing he tasted was his mother's milk," said another man. "How do you like it?"

John was nettled. He would show them he was not so green as they thought. He turned to the man who had stood him the drink. "What will you have?"

The man smiled, gratified. "Well, I don't mind if I do." Then to the girl: "Same as usual."

John nodded to two other men who stood near. "Will you join us?"

Accepting, they extended to him a friendly grin. He was not such a mug after all. The talk then flowed on. John gulped down his second glass. He now noticed that the girl with the sleek black hair was looking at him with wide-open, talking eyes. The admiration and interest in her look made him remember that he had rather a fine body. Something in him responded with a leap towards his old self-confidence. He gave a glance back which was recognition of the tribute that she paid.

"If you want a room, I'll show you," she said. "You'd better pay and come along, unless you want these fellows to fill you up."

John, having no smaller change, pushed a five-pound note across the counter. The bar-keeper looked at him with new interest. "Are you staying here long?" he asked.

"Three or four days, I expect," said John. The man nodded and passed him across his change. "Four pounds sixteen shillings. It's a shilling a drink here."

"Are you coming?" said the girl. When they were outside she said: "Lord! you shouldn't show all that cash. You're lucky to get away. Never show more than half a quid. Let's 'ave a look!"

They had some difficulty in getting up the stairs, for

five drunken men lay supine in different places. "They are all 'gropers' from upcountry," commented the girl. "See the way they wave their arms in their sleep? That's because of the flies. The flies are dreadful in Talgoo. They gets into the 'abit of brushin' them off, and when they're drunk they does it just the same. Well," she added philosophically, "they pay for beds, it's their own fault if they don't sleep in them."

She showed John into a two-bedded room. "Will this do for you? Take your choice of beds. There'll be another bloke in here afore long." Then after a short pause and another meaning look: "What's your name?"

"Sherwin."

"No, your Christian name?"

"John."

"My name's Mabel. You can call me Mabel, John. Well, good night."

"Good night."

He felt, as he shut the door, a glow of response to the girl's approaches. Her strong female quality was like a challenge. Sex antagonism burnt up in him, making him wish to run after, to catch her, subdue her, and master that sensual animal that he saw in her eyes. Then as he walked across the shabby little bedroom he felt pain come back upon him. How loathsome all this was! How far from him all that he had dreamt and hoped! How he hated the present! Yet what else was there? That it was all so different, was the one consolation which grew to a savage exultation. He would trample on all his old self, exacting a pitiful revenge. Oh! she had lied to him, lied to and renounced him. Such faith could never grow again.

•

He would trample it deep in the mire. To be able to live he must kill that aching weakness in himself. Everything had gone, only sensuality was left.

He lay still, long into the night, listening to the noises of the hotel. Men were shouting and swearing in the bar and in the passage-way. From the bedrooms came hoarse shouts and from the rooms opposite and on either hand came the retching and belching of abandoned drunkenness.

II

The next morning John was up late. He had a dry feeling in his throat and a cold hard lump in his stomach. He had no appetite, so went out without breakfast and walked down the wide street in the bright sunshine looking at the shops. By a shop that sold books and papers he paused. There were names on some of the covers of the books that he had learnt about from Mrs. Cray. No, he would not read, he would tightly shut out all that life; it was too thick with pain. He walked on towards the open flats of the salt marshes. Here, amongst the wild things, in the open air and the sunshine, a little breath of the old life came back, bringing with it the same pain. Hastily he turned back towards the town.

At the hotel he dined in the big saloon under the burning iron roof. Flies swarmed on walls and ceiling, and hung in black festoons on the coloured paper, which long ago had been put up in honour of some feast. John ate the rich, hot meal greedily; there was nothing in it to remind him of the clean frugal food of the camp.

When he had finished, the innkeeper, strolling in, greeted him and took a seat at his table.

"And how long do you think of staying?" he asked.



THE TOWN

197

"A day or two."

"Are you thinking of going up the line?"

"Perhaps, I'm not sure."

"You're not wanting a job?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, you won't mind my mentioning it, but you seem new to this part. If you carry bank-notes on you you may one day find them missing; it's best to have them put away somewhere. Now if you are staying here for a bit, and there seems to be no reason why you shouldn't—it's comfortable enough and there's good food—I'd take care of your money for you, keep it safe. Then you could just eat and drink here and I'd reckon it off against your account. When you go, you could have the balance."

To John, who had been rather embarrassed by his wad of notes, the idea appeared quite good. He thanked the innkeeper for his consideration and without further discussion handed him over fifty pounds. Some half-conscious thought at the back of his mind made him feel that he might need some money for sudden and private purposes. It would strip him of strength to be left quite moneyless. He kept back thirty pounds odd.

The fifty pounds was more than the brightest hopes of the innkeeper had risen to, not that he had not taken cheques of twice that size off fellows before, but then John was so young, and didn't look as if he'd had much money. He now folded the notes carefully and with satisfaction before putting them in his pocket. "Well, you can stay here and have all that you want. Don't stint yourself," he said, rising.

John nodded, relieved at not having so much money about his person.

III

In the afternoon John lounged on one of the long, red divans of the big saloon. In the corner was a small private bar for the convenience of guests staying in the hotel, and which in the evening took the overflow from the outer bar. For some time he was the only occupant of the room. He sat idly there having nothing else to do; besides, the air was a little cooler than outside under the awning. On hearing the clink of tumblers he looked up and saw that Mabel had come into the bar in the corner.

"Hullo! All alone — are you out of sorts?" she said.

John resented the question. "No, it's damned hot, that's all."

She strolled across to close where he sat and leant against a table. "Well, I suppose you're like the rest, work till you've made a cheque, then slack about and have a good time till you've spent it? But you didn't give all your money to the boss, did you?"

John perceived a significance in her question. "No."

Their eyes met and he knew that they were both conscious of each other's thoughts. His glance travelled on over her body, noting its proportions. Then he stood up rather awkwardly close to her. There was between them an acute consciousness of sex attraction. His instinct told him that here was a woman who deliberately offered herself to what was an habitual gratification. She also was aware of the fierceness of his need, divining that everything in him had, for the time, turned to desire.

For a moment they said nothing, then John put a hand on her arm. She came towards him, yielding to his grip, then in abandonment pressed close to him. For a time they clasped oblivious, in a kiss such as John had never experienced.

Steps and voices were heard approaching the door. Mabel pushed herself free and turned to the newcomers with an astonishing coolness. John was obliged to turn away to regain composure. His brain was thick and dizzy.

Three men entered, demanding drinks. They asked John to join them. He didn't mind what he did; he was pulsing with excitement and glad to meet them on their own footing. The fiery spirit seemed good as he gulped it down, there was pleasure too in listening to the coarse jokes of one of his companions and in knowing what was between him and the woman there, with the hungry, speaking eyes. As time went on he became talkative, excited, and stood drinks all round. Other men came in. He stood more drinks, flushed with the power of being able to show off. They were amused at him, made him talk. He babbled all sorts of nonsense, drank and shouted, and all the while the thought of the girl blazed in his mind like a smoky torch. The drink gave him new power, new strength, making him more perfect for her embrace.

As time went on and the room filled up John became moody, clasping his one thought. Though he felt his head swimming he asked defiantly for another glass. Mabel leant towards him.

"You've had all you can hold," she whispered. "You better go to bed now."

He understood, and was for a moment sobered by a tightening of excitement in his chest. Without answering, he turned and staggered across the room. A voice shouted scornfully, with a burst of drunken laughter, something about having had enough already, but he didn't heed.

On the upper corridor Mabel was waiting. He didn't speak, there was no need of speech, but followed her up yet another flight of stairs. He was blind, dumb, oblivious to everything but one overmastering impulse.

IV

When he woke the next morning John had a very bad headache and couldn't remember where he was. He lay still, looking at the lighter square of the window and the drawn blind. Then remembrance came back like a searing flame. For a while he was unwilling to look at the woman by his side. A weakness and a desire to cry came over him. Had he been in the open lying upon the earth he could have wept and been refreshed. How deep was his misery? He questioned. How different was life from the brave hopes of his love? What was upon him now was reality and the present. Life was real and no dream. How he hated the beastly woman who lay there breathing heavily. He turned to look at her. Her face was red and puffy, her black scurfy hair dragged across the rumpled pillow. The stabbing thought came that he had better die than know such degradation; and yet his strong instinct for life was even then turning against itself in hatred. Life with its recurring convulsions of pain had still to rend itself many times before he could win to any freedom. Again he looked,

at the girl. He was glad she was still asleep; he didn't think that he could bear having to talk to her and look at her. Very quietly he got out of bed. She moved and turned over, but did not wake. Then John collected his clothes and hurried down to his room.

With the day, came the same monotony of idleness and the same resurging of his pain, followed by the fierce desire. By midday Mabel appeared looking, in contrast to his last view of her, very powdered and neat. Though he now hated her, she still had the same unanswerable attraction.

Since there was no incentive in Ruperttown for John to do anything, he stayed on in idleness at the hotel, and the days and weeks went by. As time passed he came to hate Mabel so much that he thought he would kill her. It gave him pleasure to think of different possible ways. At any rate, she was his to struggle against in mutual mutilation. He would tear the very essence of life out of her, grip her with steel muscles and crush her cruelly beneath his weight.

When drinking at the bar John won a cheap sort of notoriety for his recklessness and the foulness of his speech. He drank heavily, his strong constitution being able to stand the foul stuff that was sold as whisky, though it left its mark on him. His face became blotchy, his eyes bloodshot. His former self, together with his pain, became less active, more inclined to slumber. His soul submerged in self-hatred could find in lethargy a welcome oblivion. Upon its sensitiveness he could heap the ruins of his youth, burying safe from any breath of thought that tender surface, which winced and bled beneath the sharp cruelty of recollection. Then one day

there came an incident which woke him to new life and new pain.

In one of the gloomy phases of drunkenness he was sitting in the dining saloon; his head was heavy, and for the most part he kept his eyes shut, because of the throbbing in his eyeballs. Two men in well-fitting white suits sat at a table close by. Their voices drew John's attention. They were cultured, clear voices, reminding him at once of Cray. He opened his eyes to see what sort of men they were, feeling at the same time resentment. They were both men of about thirty, obviously not inhabitants of Ruperttown. One of them was stolid in appearance for so young a man. He had a somewhat bloated look, without being in any way corpulent. His eyes, which seemed to note with a mixture of pleasure, amusement, and disdain his friend's arguments, were intelligent, though glassy. On the whole a remarkable figure, even attractive, except when you noticed the back of his neck which was thick and puffy. His companion who was now speaking, and whose voice it was that had attracted John's attention, was a vivacious, fair-haired man with deep wrinkles on his forehead which he continually twitched as he spoke.

"How can you?" he contended. "You, who are the collector and possessor of so many fine works of art, affect to despise men? The firm and harmonious feeling which is expressed in their work — you cannot despise that. . . . Why, take even these savages, whom we've just left, the lowest type of men, their message — sticks and boomerangs, all the paraphernalia of their sacred dances, each is ornamented correctly, with the right feeling, expressive of the designer's sense of harmony and also

possessing, what one might call, a religious dignity. Take the next step in evolution — go to the Malays and Paupans with their grotesque and awe-inspiring figures — surely they speak of the maker's soul. Such works live for all time, clothed in their peculiar beauty — a terrifying beauty, I admit — but the beauty is there. Go further — across the Pacific, and you cannot dare to despise the markers of the vast megaliths — the dwellers on the great lost continent who have fashioned figures more august and greater even than we with all our machinery can rival. Take any civilization or people that you like: Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Florentine or even the moderns, their work speaks for them, vindicating the soul of man, expressing it always with dignity and beauty."

"Your arguments don't do your intelligence much credit," replied the other. "All that may sound very well, but it's superficial. You don't discriminate. Of course, man has made beautiful things; why else should I collect them? But have you ever met a man or woman (don't answer in a hurry) who was beautiful and harmonious in the way that even the simplest design is harmonious; and not only that, but who was not petty, contemptible and even foul in the less obvious though deeper channels of his life? No. Men are the manure out of which the fine flower of art can grow. I despise them because I know them. They are mean and greedy. Always greedy. Greedy for money, or food, or women, or fame. They call their greed ambition or love, as it suits them; but underneath it's just dirty, guzzling, gutter-greediness, the greed of a lustful and conceited animal. Yes, and above all, hypocritical."

While he spoke it was easy to see that he was on a theme which to expound gave him some pleasure.

"They are vermin — dirty vermin. Yes, even you and I, my friend, are like that." He smiled, offering his cigarette-box. "Of course, you and I get our clothes from a good tailor — that is, when there happens to be one, which is not the case in Australia — and wash several times a day. Usually I am not so bad mannered as to destroy the sentimental insincerities that we live behind; but when you confuse a man with the work that he produces, then ——" He didn't finish the sentence, but merely looked deprecatingly at the ash on his cigarette, which he blew away. "When you next go out anywhere, here or in Europe, just look at humanity with as little prejudice as possible. There is not *one* moral quality or motive that is not pretending to be something that it is not, and to hide from mankind his own filthiness. Every public utterance from ministers, archbishops, and the rest of them is for the same purpose, and based upon a foundation of lying assumptions. Not one of these speakers but would blush to have his motives analysed or his thoughts known. And if we knew them, we would all scream with rage and shame because they are so like our own." He smiled, with a sense of the completeness of his intellectual assurance. "You ask how it is possible to despise men; I ask how is it possible to do anything else?"

His friend was impressed, but not convinced. "You must admit," he said, "that there is a relation between a man and the work he produces. If the work is good, then the man must possess that good quality."

"Just the relation between a dunghill and the flower growing upon it."

"But the flower grows from a seed."

"Yes, but the seed isn't generated by the dunghill, as you might know."

"From where does it come, then?"

"From previous generations of flowers, just as in art. Tradition." He smiled ironically. "The good God has ordained that works of art shall grow out of men just as flowers out of dung. There is the relation." Then, as if exasperated by the other's stupidity. "Just look about you if you want to be convinced." He nodded in John's direction. "There's a specimen of hopeful young humanity with a few of the veils off. He's so drunk all the time we've been here (and for a good deal longer, I expect) that he's no eyes or thoughts except for a dirty, lousy female whom you and I (because we have the habit of being well-dressed and washed, that's the chief reason) wouldn't touch with the end of our umbrellas. It has amused me to observe them together. Sometimes he looks at her with quite a pleasing sincerity, without any disguise. No doubt he would call it love, if he were articulate; and with good reason."

John felt such rage surge up in him that he knew that for the moment he could not speak. Then he rose and walked to the table where the two men were sitting.

"You —— ——!" he used the only words that in the vernacular of swearing could express his disdain. Words that cannot safely be applied in anger to even the most degraded. "You dried up miserable creature. You know nothing with all your damned talk. You've

never tried to live. Better be a verminous rat born to failure than a thing like you." He bent over the young man's scared face and bawled at him. He was so excited that tears were in his voice; he hardly knew what he was saying. "Don't speak of love, you beast."

All the men in the room had risen to their feet, surprised at what seemed to them an unprovoked, drunken attack. Already the host and one of his assistants were running forward to interfere.

The young, well-dressed stranger, quickly recovering from the first shock of the assault, had scrambled to his feet and stepped back quickly. "Take the drunken brute away," he said, with cool contempt.

"By God! I'll do for you," roared John, stung to fresh rage. He made a rush forward, striking furiously. One blow got in, but the other missed; then he was hurled back. He didn't know whether it was two, or three, or more men against him, but he fought on, mad with rage, regardless how many blows fell. In particular he remembered being struck twice very hard on the body and on the chin. He then became dizzy and the strength went out of him, but he staggered on under yet more blows, feeling the sharp quick jerks of them rather than the pain. At last a black and all-obscuring cloud shut down over his brain with a feeling of blessed relief, then he fell.

"Damn the young swine; I've fairly broke my knuckles on his jaw," complained the host. Then he turned apologetically to the man who had been assaulted. "I'm very sorry, sir. I hope he didn't hit you hard. I knew he was a bad-blooded young devil, but I never fancied as how he'd play out like that all of a sudden. He's been

here long enough, I'll turn him out after this. It's the last he'll have from me." Then looking again at his knuckles. "My word, I must have fairly broke his jaw. I'd have never thought there was so much fight in him, after going the pace as he has for a month!"

The young man, who had now entirely recovered his composure, merely looked some of his contempt at the self-gratulating and ingratiating attitude of the inn-keeper, then glancing down at John's unconscious figure he said slowly, emphasizing each word. "Take the filthy brute away and kill him."

v

When John recovered consciousness he found that he had been rolled out into the backyard of the hotel, and was now lying amongst some short, rank grass that grew sparsely round a scrap-heap formed of empty tins and broken bottles. The sun was blazing down upon the back of his neck, making him feel sick, while each of his many bruises was pulsing as if it must burst. For a while he lay still just conscious of his misery, too sore to move. Why could he not die and have done with it all? he wondered. He wished for death, not fearing it, but fearing with an overwhelming dread further degradation that might come. On this rubbish-heap he felt it was too hot to die. If it were not so hot and dry, but cooler then he might be able to die comfortably. His very discomfort stirred him to life. Where the sun was so hot, life was sure to triumph. He felt a savage need to laugh at himself. He was no weakling to die because he'd had a few knocks! Certainly he had nothing to live for, but that was very different from being able to give up life.

The very insistency of the throbbing pain in his head and limbs was a sign of life. The dry blood on his face and neck that cracked off in little flakes as he moved, all seemed a conclusive proof of his obstinate vitality. He rose to his feet swaying unsteadily; but only for a moment. He had to kneel down again because of a cracking feeling in his head. If only he could get to the tank and drink some water, he thought, nothing else would much matter; that would be sufficient. He started to crawl on hands and knees, hoping that no one would come out from the hotel and jeer at him. The way seemed long, and twice he had to rest, but at last he reached the tap. He let the water run into his mouth and over his face. That was better; he felt stronger now, and again stood up.

Outside the yard there was a row of low cottages, and to one side of them was a thicket of bushes. John looked at this thicket enviously. If he could get into their shade, then he would be able to rest. Gathering all his strength he walked swaying across the yard. At the gateway he had to pause, clinging on to one of the gates for support. The way his limbs trembled and his knuckles rattled against the woodwork seemed somehow ludicrous; then pity for himself surged up and tears began to run down his face as the black picture of present misery swept before him, blotting out that hurrying and tremulous thought of dreamed-of happiness. He felt then how small and weak he was. How had he dared hope for anything? Now, if in all humility he could reach the shade of the thicket it would be happiness enough. His love was dead, and dust. No, not dead, but hot dust and an ache more burning than all his bodily



THE TOWN

209

bruises. A cowardly thought came to him: if he could cry from his heart, just once, expressing all his sorrow, then, as the wound opened and let forth his agony, the shuck of him that was left behind would be so empty that he would die. The thought burnt through him like the passion of love, making him tremble more violently. He was dumb and knew that he would remain dumb always. Then more practical thoughts came to him. There was still the thicket to be reached. Half laughing, now half crying at his weakness he staggered across the intervening ground and crawled deep into the thicket. For a long while he lay still, content to be at rest. The pains in his brain became less acute, and he slept. When he awoke it was dark. He felt much better — not nearly so dizzy, though still very stiff. Stretching his limbs and feeling his bruises he began to take an interest in his recovery. It was strange, he thought, that he should care for anything so trivial. He was glad of the silence of the night time. There was in the air of the night a touch of softness, a comfort which was not tangible, but which enveloped him gently.

Then again he slept, this time not waking till late in the morning.

The sun was well up, and through the twigs and leaves he could see bright patches of blue sky. People were occasionally passing down the road. He was glad that he was concealed and could lie there unobserved. In the cottage that was nearest the thicket, the door was wide open and John could hear the sounds of a woman cleaning her house. He shifted his position so that he could see the open door and also could look down the road which lay in front of the cottages. Two small boys

passed, who he hoped would not see him; then a woman came down the road. She stopped at the open door and looked in.

"Good morning, Mrs. Leeth, I'm sorry to hear that you've had more trouble."

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Tracy. My life's been full of trouble; eight children in nine years; and only three of them left now this one's been took."¹

The voices became lower and muffled and John supposed that the two women had gone into the house. After an interval they came to the door again and he heard Mrs. Leeth complaining: "There's not been much going out for me since I was married. He never does a hand's turn to help me with the home; he's all for outside, he is — people don't know what I've had to put up with — never even wash up the breakfast things, he won't, not when I had to take the poor baby to hospital and be there by nine, and when I got back past twelve and the children wantin' their dinner I got to wash up, he grumbling 'cause his dinner wasn't ready. . . . Then the next day when they sent round to say the baby was dead, he didn't say nothing. He don't care." The voice now became less accusing though more charged with indignation, with tears not far distant.¹

The voices again became indistinct and John lay still, feeling his cheeks drawn and thin. In his brain there was a painful sickness. Here was a misery worn hard with sordid outrage. Life was cruel and unrelenting as he too had felt it, but more sordid than he had

¹ Passage omitted at advice of the publisher.

imagined. But oh, the years, the long years of its duration! Was it courage or mere stupidity that made poor human animals endure to live yet other years of suffering? Perhaps that beast of a fellow in the hotel had reason to despise men, but it was rather pity that John felt, pity and a passionate regret for the dreams of his youth. In those moments of intense understanding, as he lay motionless in the bushes, he saw his early life as a happy dream now far away. The picture of life now before him was reality. Here was the great mainland of human suffering upon which he too had trodden. He knew with a sure conviction that Mrs. Leeth was no exception. She was one of hundreds and of hundreds of thousands. The picture of suffering humanity dazed his imagination. In Ruperttown there were many others with probably as hard a fate; and just as Ruperttown stood to John's small experience as the symbol of all civilization, so Mrs. Leeth in the squalor of her affliction symbolized the sordid suffering of all humanity. He felt the infectious breath of compromise and failure blown towards him, threatening to hold down in the mire for ever the broken opinions of his faith. He was possessed by terror at the vast indifference of mankind towards crimes perpetuated against the spirit of life, and his soul, already stricken and made weak with pain, shrank back before the shadow of despair.

While the women had been speaking the interest of what they had said had held him; now that they had ceased, he felt that it would be intolerable to remain any longer concealed where he was. He wanted to be away from men and women; the wide gulf between the reality of life and his boyish ideals was so great, that even the

desire for wreaking upon himself vengeance for his failure now dwindled, leaving nothing but the instinct of some wounded animal for solitude.

It was not difficult to escape without observation from his hiding-place. He had no thought of trying to recover the money that, in his innocence, he had handed over to the innkeeper. The few weeks that he had known of civilization were sufficient to teach him that there was small chance of its recovery. Nearly all the money that he had kept by him he had at one time or another given to Mabel. He now had but a few shillings, sufficient, he was glad to think, to buy him a meal.

Near the railway station at the back of the town was a small Coffee Palace. Here John bought food and drink. In the afternoon he walked up the line which ran straight eastward into a country of mulga scrub and bare red dust. Not far from the town the track climbed a long gradient. Near the top of this John waited, lying down in the shadow of some acacia bushes. For a while he slept, being still tired from the experiences of the previous day. In the evening he was woken by the Garloo and Mt. Gerard train puffing slowly up the incline. John waited concealed in the bushes till it had almost passed, then ran out and swung himself up above the wheel-axles of the last coach. He had heard of this method of travelling, and now found that he could hoist himself clear of the moving axles, and without much difficulty hold himself in safety. When the train had climbed the gradient and the pace increased John had to hold tight and was much jolted. He found, in a little, a better position, and in spite of the many jolts was consoled to think that every minute took him further from the hated port of Ruperttown.

CHAPTER VII

THE DESERT

I

NORTH-EAST of Garloo a tableland of red granite stretches for sixty miles before it abruptly breaks to the shores of Lake Harrison. In winter the lake, which is thirty miles long, is covered with a thin layer of water, but in summer its thick mud is caked over with a far-stretching expanse of blue-white salt. The upland plateau, with the long, red cliff dipping to the lake is typical of the West Australian bush. The quartz and felspar of the granite have split into the finest dust, which is caked hard on the surface and cracked by the sun's heat. Here and there at intervals dry, blue-leaved mulga bushes break the surface, thin gnarled stems—expressive of a struggle against extreme heat and lack of water. In this desert there is small variety of animal or bird life. The aboriginal natives are now almost extinct and never to be seen in their wild state. Kangaroos and wallabies are still abundant in the neighbourhood of water-holes. Smaller animals there are of various kinds: echidnas, bandicoots and mice, though no species is very plentiful. Of birds there are few. The red and black crows, the wheelbarrow bird, who makes a noise like the squeaking of an unoiled wheel, an occasional parroquet that screams as his green wings

flash by, and sometimes there appear larger flocks of tiny birds that sweep from bush to bush with faint chirpings. The stillness of the land is what gives it its quality and its beauty. Here bird-voices do not mingle as in Europe; each sounds separate and alone, emphasizing the silence. The bushes also seem to minister to the stillness. They grow separate, divided by large spaces of sun-baked earth. Their feathery branches, poised in the motionless air, seem like raised hands commanding attention, waiting for some secret voice, guarding with pious gesture the ancient spirit, which by virtue of its external restraint has remained young, while a million generations of such gnarled slow-living shapes, have fulfilled their guardianship, have waited, always hushed for the secret, and have become dust.

North of Garloo there are a series of water-holes, at one time used by the natives. They lead in an irregular chain some thirty miles into the bush, forming convenient bases for gold-prospectors and sandal-wood cutters. Close to one of these holes Loo Radcliffe and John Sherwin made their first temporary camp after leaving Garloo.

John had travelled as far as Garloo, hanging on to the underside of the last coach of the Mt. Gerard train. He had then been too stiff to go further and had stayed in the town for a few days; during which time he had taken any odd jobs that he could pick up. By chance he had fallen in with Radcliffe, who had come to the town covered with the red dust of the bush, fresh from sandal-wood cutting. They had talked together, and Radcliffe had agreed to employ John at piecework. He had advanced him a small sum of money on the agreement

that John should work for six months with him in the bush; then they had together bought John's equipment, which consisted of an ax, very carefully chosen, two cooking "billies" and a "bluey." Radcliffe had then purchased sufficient stores for a long expedition into the bush. These had been loaded into a light, though spacious, handcart, and they had set off, dragging the cart behind them.

John would have been glad to go with any one who would offer him a means of livelihood, away from the towns, with their temptation of cheap women and bad drink, and he had not looked at Radcliffe with any critical judgment. Solitude was the medicine for which he craved; any one who would help him to the fulfilment of that desire he would willingly accept. Loo—he was seldom known by any other name, and had almost forgotten that he had another—was a typical bush groper. He had lived for so many years in the bush that he would have found existence anywhere else impossible. He had become red like the soil, the fine particles of dust having worked deep into his skin. Like most solitary workers he was given to long silences. Of this John was glad, having no wish to talk, far less to be questioned. He wanted merely to be away by himself and lost to mankind. The new knowledge and experience of pain must have time to adjust itself. Perhaps with time and solitude his soul would grow strong enough to bear that weight, and not, as now, to sink under it in agony.

The first day they dragged their cart ten miles northward through the bush. Across the desert-scrub there was fairly easy going, the ground being level and the bushes so far apart that it was usually easy to go between

them. Throughout the heat of the day the two men worked in silence save for brief directions from Loo as to which way to drag the cart. It was not till evening, when they reached a water-hole, that any exchange that approached a conversation took place. Loo tasted the water critically. "It's all right, but flat. Make a fire and boil it; you'd better fill your water-bottle for tomorrow before it gets mucked up. Some of the water up here tastes better than this, but it's so full of minerals it's poisonous. You have to boil it with Epsom salts before you can drink it." Again he relapsed into silence while John collected wood and lighted a fire. Then, with his deeply lined face wrinkled into a searching look: "Is this your first time out this way?"

"Yes."

This answer didn't seem either to please or displease. Loo was silent till they had boiled both the billies, filled the bottles, and set them to boil again.

"There's no wood round here; it's too close to the town, but another ten miles, the way I'll show you there's plenty of wood and a good water-hole I've found that not many know about; leastways, I've never seen any tracks there."

John looked hard at the lined face of his companion which was deeply seamed with long cracks of red mud made of sweat and dust. There was something in its simplicity that was extraordinarily aged and extraordinarily fresh. It seemed somehow to have taken on the stamp of the desert, to reflect it, and become almost a part of it.

Loo smiled quite genially under John's direct stare.

"That's right, have a good look at me. You won't see another human face for six months or so."

"I'm glad," said John.

"That's my way of thinking; but it's not so with most, and I daresay you'll have changed your mind in a month's time, but you'll have to stick it. You won't be able to find your way back. And when we get to work don't get roaming too far away from the sound of my ax. It's easy to get 'bushed' in a country like this, every bush looks the same, and once you are lost, then, if you're new to it, you may as well give up soon as late, for there's nothing you see to guide you."

"How do you find your way?"

Loo had been waiting for the question and was pleased. "I know, I couldn't lose myself if I tried. Set me down blindfolded, and I'd find my way back. How old do you think I am?"

"Fifty."

"More than that and I've been thirty years in this country, so I ought to know it."

John put the question though he thought he knew what the answer would be. "Do you never want to go anywhere else?"

Loo, with his eyes half shut from long habit of keeping out the dust, paused before he said: "I've known men out here who've gone mad in a week from this country, and others who've walked off and shot themselves. They couldn't stand it . . . Well, I don't think I could live anywhere else . . . You'll find out for yourself. . . ." Then, as if he had said more than he had meant to and far more than his wont, Loo began to prepare the bread

for their meal. "Look in that cloth and you'll find some chops. The last mutton you'll have for some time. After this it will be kangaroo and bush turkey, and only that if we're lucky. For the rest it will be dry bread with a raw onion now and then, and very good tack, too; with a dose of Epsom Salts if you get the rot."

After they had eaten their meal John followed Loo's example and rolled himself up in his blanket. It was now twilight. The outlines of the bushes were silhouetted against a sky of pale yellow and green. The parquets and smaller birds that he had seen earlier in the day were now all gone to roost, and the only sound breaking the stillness was the regular and high-pitched whistle of the wheelbarrow bird. As darkness set in, this also became silent, and John gazed up into the great depth of the night, feeling somehow soothed and comforted. He felt, even on this, his first evening in the desert, the subtle and powerful character of its charm. There was a quality of virginity and unviolated youth in its vast and silent extent. It was as if some period of the earth's history, millions of years back, had here survived. This land had been made, even as it now remained, before ever man or even his ape-like ancestors had troubled the forces of evolution. Here, sorrow had not yet been born. Its very calm was too tranquil, its midday heat too relentless and petulant. He was glad to feel around him an element even younger than he was himself: younger and yet eternal. As an old man draws the warmth of vitality from the near presence of a child, so John, suffering from the immediate affliction of disillusionment, was able to take comfort in the wide innocence of the desert. He could feel far down in his heart a faint flut-

ter of gladness. Life was still terrible with the blackness of broken faith; and the agony of his shattered hopes still held his soul a cripple in bondage; he believed the world could offer no recompense, but could admit with a tremor of hope that fortune was at least kind in preserving so strong and beautiful a spirit of earth, untainted by the suffering of mankind.

II

The next day they left the main wheel-track that ran north of the town and struck eastward over untrodden ground. Before long Loo pointed out some good clumps of sandal-wood bushes. They did not stop for them, but pressed on towards the water-hole that was to be their base. At midday they halted on account of the heat, and shortly afterward came upon several water-holes, at one of which they made their camp, burying most of their provisions so that mice and ants should not devour them.

The work of sandal-wood cutting is a solitary trade. Each man goes by himself over a certain area of ground cutting all the wood that he can find. He then drags it to a central pile which is to be later collected. The whole day is spent in this solitary search for the precious wood, and most often the two fellow-workers do not speak or come within hail during the day's work. At evening they will meet at the camp to make a fire, boil tea and prepare an evening meal. Their guns they have with them always, so that they can shoot any kangaroo or bush turkey that comes within range.

For the first days John followed Loo's advice and kept always within sound of his ax for fear that he should be

lost, but later, when he came to know with assurance certain landmarks, he went fearlessly by himself, working outwards from the centre, and returning by even circles to well-known ground. His first feeling of relief in the presence of the untamed country returned more strongly, now that, for day after day, he worked alone. The silence of the bush, broken only by the stroke of his own ax, seemed the natural medicine of his soul. Here, there was time and space to think and feel in quiet. Around him, in the living things and in the growth of the trees, were reflections of his earlier life. Wild nature he had loved, living always close to the earth, and was now glad to feel his life enveloped and soothed by the untroubled beauty of its virginity. This feeling lasted for a while, then a new one slowly grew in its place. He began to realize the cold indifference of nature's smile. As the discords of his own mind became less insistent, and his pain less turbulent, he felt with an overpowering vividness the insignificance of human life. He came to know with convincing certainty that all human power was but an accident possessing but a trifle's weight compared with the sublime endurance of the desert. He argued, that men could spread over the desert, changing the nature of the land; but the argument gave no assurance. Even though man should cover the whole world with his importance, he would become thereby, more than ever accidental and irrelevant. The stars and the vast spaces of the sky would still smile down as coldly, chilling his imagination to humbleness, teaching him the knowledge of his insignificance.

The days passed and John worked in solitude. The sound of his ax falling upon the hard, brittle wood seemed

the only barrier that shut out the growing terror of the desert. Yet the fear grew each day. The easy confidence that he had earlier had in the presence of all wild things was now withdrawn. Familiar objects seemed grotesquely magnified, terrible in their mystical significance. In the presence of the soft, almost honey-sweet, smile of the desert the familiar humming of a bee reminded him of the duration of eternity.

Sometimes he would stop his work and gaze at the dry branches that had grown there at the command of the great spirit of the land; or had they grown in defiance of that spirit? he wondered. Their gnarled, dry stems looked as if they had taken a hundred years in the making. He thought he recognized in the scaly bark and flat, blue leaves a great humility; marvelling that they should have the audacity for even the soft and delicate expression of their blossoms. Then, in a sudden terror of the tiny sounds caused by insects or a breath of air, he would swing his ax, finding an escape from fear in the working of his own muscles and the sound of the ax on the wood. His mind would run on the question, Why had those bushes lived there? Why grown so remote and self-possessed? However hard he worked, and whatever he thought, the desert was always enveloping him with its silent smile: a smile that yet remained indifferent to the advent of man upon the world, aloof from any of his aspirings. John came to understand what Loo had told him about men going mad in the desert. He was not going to do that. He had lost confidence, though not the love of life. Though he feared; he was glad of its solitude. Here all impurity was washed from his soul.

His sorrow, too, dwindled, seeming to diffuse itself into the objects about him. He had sometimes a passionate impulse to save some of his most intimate recollections from the oblivion of indifference that brooded around. He was afraid, often mortally afraid, of his loneliness, yet his brain insisted that he must master his fear or perish.

Then as weeks and months passed, the terror of the waiting silence grew less. It became familiar. His heart grew larger, taking from the desert some of its wide tranquillity. Once he lay down upon the earth and wept with relief that his fear was passing. In his tears was gratitude for a new and growing confidence — a confidence not in life, or any sunny smiles of fortune, but in himself, founded upon the firm base of suspicion and despair. His pain no longer consumed him, though the ache of it would remain for always. Something august and gentle had entered into his heart.

Now that his terror was passed, John felt a growing interest in his companion. He understood now the expression in Loo's half-shut eyes, and why he was so silent. He himself wished to be silent, but was glad of the presence of the other man. At night, when they sat together by the fire, he would feel a bond of close comradeship. It gave him an admiration and love for his companion, to know that he had lived, for so many years, alone, and without failure, so close to the naked spirit of reality. In the smile of the desert there was no forgiveness or pity. If man in his audacity should venture so close to the uncovered heart of life he would find treachery and guile, cruelty, swift madness and death; but should he survive, it would be by power of a love

deep enough to comprehend the duplicity of life, and a suspicion deep as his love. There was pleasure in the thought of Loo's long wanderings in the desert and an increasing, though subdued, joy in the belief that so potent a spirit must give them each day a closer resemblance. Their beings seemed to be fashioned to the same mould. There was no need for them to speak to express their sympathy. Brought together by the compelling quality of the bush, they were, in spite of the difference of age and experience, like two friends of long standing. Theirs was the same strength in weakness, the same humility, the same religion.

The life in the bush, though from day to day presenting little variety, is never monotonous. Those who live there often become oblivious of time. They do not count the days or know them. When sufficient wood was collected Loo and John returned to the town where they hired horses and a cart, with which to collect their store of chopped wood; then they returned again to the bush.

More than six months had passed in this way when the rains came. They lasted only for a week, but they changed the whole face of the land. The red dust was at first covered with tiny shoots. These grew to a carpet of green which burst into pink and white blossoms. Each flower had dry, brittle petals and gave out a faint scent of honey. Innumerable insects soon swarmed everywhere. Large stick-insects became active on the green sprouts of the acacia bushes. Grasshoppers of all sizes were produced as by magic, and swarms of hover-flies and sand-wasps filled the air. In places the desert was white as snow with tiny blossoms. The sudden and surprising

beauty was overwhelming. John felt it keenly, and it brought new sadness. Such joyful expression reminded him too intimately of Mrs. Cray. The desert now seemed to possess her soft and silent capacity for ecstasy. The frenzy of such fervent blossoming was pain. He saw in it the enthusiasm of his love, knowing that such prodigality could never again be his.

For three weeks the flowers lasted, then the heat of the sun burnt them and all the life that they supported to fine powder, mingling them with the red dust of the earth. Again the dry heat settled upon the desert, the ground opened in cracks beneath the sun's rays, and the green leaves and white flowers became like the remembrance of a passing dream.

Often the silent heat of midday was disturbed by fierce gusts of wind known locally as "Cock-eyed-Bobs." These swifts and currents of air not more than a yard of two in width rush roaring across the levels, carrying a cloud of red dust with them, and whirling along broken boughs. John could always hear them coming and found them easy to avoid, though sometimes when one turned at an unexpected angle he had to move quickly to escape the whirl and dust left in its wake. These currents, which every day race across the plain, are small imitations, as it were, and gentle reminders of the tremendous "Willy-Willies" which yearly sweep the country, breaking down all obstructions and often carrying away the feathered live-stock from the farms and stations, depositing them miles away in the desert never to be seen again by their owners.

Once, when one of these swift winds had passed not far distant, John noticed bright flashes of metallic blue

moving about the upper boughs of the mulga bushes near him. On looking more closely he saw for the first time the bright, blue butterflies of the "bush." By following their irregular flight he was able to observe one closely. It perched, with several others of its kind, on a small dead bush and there, sometimes slowly, as if in leisurely enjoyment, sometimes quickly in an ecstasy of delight opened and closed its brilliant wings. That so bright an insect should live among the dull, soft colours of the "bush" was surprising, so, too, was the fragility of so airy a thing which dared live in the proximity of roaring winds and under fierce rays that burnt all living matter to dust. John watched with a kind of awed wonder its delicate independence. He was astonished at the enigma of its existence. This frail life, which existed with obvious joy upon the scorched, inhospitable desert, swept by fierce winds, was in itself a question set to stagger all philosophies. Was chance always to remain master of the ends of life? He wondered whether he himself and other men had any power over the direction of their lives. Certainly he had believed that he had such power, or did he merely exist in some space of quiet air and at such a moment when no fierce wind rushed by, destroying his kind, whirling them along in dust and storm? Then, in the stillness he was dismayed by the thought of a brain that could see and measure its own destruction. His dismay lasted but a moment, followed by unexpected gladness. There was exhilaration in the belief in the hazards of chance; there was delight like a douche of cold water in that feeling of freedom. As he gazed at the butterfly it clicked its wings over its back and danced up into the air. John

followed its flight, catching a reflection of its gladness.

Not only for six months, as he had agreed, but for more than twice that time did John remain in the bush with Loo Radcliffe. The life, when once he had mastered it, possessed a strange attraction, and for a long while he had no desire to mix with other men. He had become genuinely fond of Loo, although they had talked little together. Their companionship had been very silent; the surrounding stillness of the desert had expressed, for each of them, all that could need expression. After fifteen months, John had earned considerably more than a hundred pounds. He had gained a new assurance in himself and was supremely well. The desire to travel once more amongst men grew slowly but with certainty. One day he told Loo that he was going further up the line. Loo received the information in silence, but later that evening remarked that further east the rainfall was too uncertain for the growth of good wood, though there was gold he knew. "Gold is always uncertain," he said. "Of course, you may have your luck, but if you should want to come back you'll find me hereabouts." Then, as if it were an effort, "If you are down on your luck, come back here." John nodded; he was wonderfully glad of Loo's friendship, feeling that their mutual understanding did not need for its expression the feebleness of speech. Amongst the chances of life he had found at least one thing calm and enduring. At their parting he had no regrets, such personal and now petty-seeming sentiments he felt he had left behind, though the thought of meeting again warmed him with pleasure.

A few days later he walked into Garloo with his kit, slung on his ax, over his shoulder. He drew money at



THE DESERT

227

the bank, and lunched at the hotel, taking pleasure in ordering the best of everything. Then in the evening he strolled down to the station and took train for Mt. Gerard.

III

At Mt. Gerard John did not stay for long, finding it too populous, also very expensive to live in. He took train on to Tharamecka, which is at the head of the line, where he heard that the country was newly opened to prospectors.

All that marked the station at Tharamecka was a small shed and two huge tanks raised on high wooden supports. Near the railhead is a store, about which cluster hessian and corrugated iron huts. A buggy was standing near the station building. Out of the train a prosperous-looking man jumped and hailed the buggy driver, then climbed up beside him. He was about to give the order to drive away when John boldly asked him where he was going.

"Out to the 'Magenta' claim. Have you business there?"

"Not yet. Is there a job to be got?"

The stranger eyed him. "I want all the labour I can get."

"Are you Boss out there?"

"I'm a partner."

"Will you take me out?"

"All right, jump up."

The stranger, whose name was Stephens, tried to persuade John to work for him by agreement for a three months' span, but John wished to keep his independence,

having an idea that he would like to do some prospecting on his own. He wanted the excitement of the element of chance, also to be his own master. He agreed, however, to work for a couple of weeks at the regular wage.

It was a thirty-mile drive across open bush country from Tharamecka to the "Magenta" claim. The same red granite stretches here, as further west, broken only by long dykes of schist. In these schist dykes, which were often fifty or sixty yards across were veins of quartz and lesser dykes of ironstone, olivine and serpentine. Stephens told John that gold, when it was to be found, was usually in these latter. The country was flat except for the slight rise of the long parallel dykes which did not decompose quite so rapidly as the matrix of granite. Trees grew here more commonly than near Garloo, as the rainfall was more certain, also underground water was frequent. The buggy followed wheel-tracks across country, where a cart could easily be driven over the bare spaces between the growth of vegetation.

After about twenty miles they came on the camp of some prospectors who offered a share of their evening meal. They did not stay for long, but it was on the dark side of twilight by the time they reached the outskirts of the "Magenta" camp. They drove up to a row of tents which marked head-quarters. Stephens jumped down, and after putting his bag in his tent, walked towards a camp-fire about a hundred yards' distant.

Round the blaze of dry wood sat a ring of between twenty and thirty men. Their attention was now centred on an elderly man of about sixty who stood well forward in the light, talking with ingenuous enthusiasm and much gesture. The men were listening with an



THE DESERT

229

amused relish. Stephens had approached without being noticed by many. He exchanged nods and stood back in the shadow listening. John he motioned to wait, saying in explanation, "It's old Gilbert wound up for the night. Listen to him, he's a rare old bird, and as mad as a hatter."

Gilbert stood in the firelight smiling and gesticulating. The irregularities of his handsome hawk-like face, deeply lined from years of hard work and red with the dust amongst which he lived, were sharply emphasized by hard lights and dark shadows. "She was sitting there without moving, her great face like a brass tower on the stern of a battleship, with eight eyes on it. Yes, eight eyes: two of them big, and one biggest of all in the middle of her forehead, and five little ones. . . . And round each eye, which was red like a ruby, was a double row of warts like the boss on a shield, and in each wart was a tuft of spines. . . . And no expression in the whole; but dead blank. . . . And she looked at him. No wonder he was nervous. . . . And he, with his long legs and his little skinty body, kept dancing to and fro and sidling up, and running away, and putting out one of his long claws and feeling towards her. Then he moved round, thinking perhaps she'd look better from behind. . . . But she moved round with him, keeping her face to him without moving, leastways, you couldn't tell how she moved. So he kept going round, and the old woman looking at him from her hairy eyes. You should have seen him, as it were, pick up his heart in his hands and come running up amorous-like. He shot out his long claw and stood all a-tremble still." Gilbert imitated the attitude. "She didn't move, but she just

wagged her jaws at him sideways and lifted her great whiskers up and down over her mouth. That was too much for his nerves altogether, he fair fell over backwards with fright. 'Poor devil,' I thought. She was a terrible woman to make love to. After that the gentleman was more obsequious, he put on his most winning smile and kept rubbing his hands together and hopping on his long hind-legs. Then he came cringing up, walking as it were, on his knees, begging her to have pity on his love. She looked at him from out of her great blank face and I could almost see her eyebrows twitching." There was a roar of applauding laughter. "Go on, Gilbert," some one shouted, "draw it mild." "Well, if it wasn't her eyebrows twitching, her legs were getting ready for a spring. Then, in a flash she was on him, her cannibal jaws biting his little soft body. He hadn't time even to squeal. She devoured him whole, leaving only the tips of his legs, that were dry and not worth the trouble of sucking."

A laugh greeted the tragic *dénouement*. Some one asked: "How did you come to think of all that, Gilbert?"

"Think of it? I saw it with my own eyes."

Now that the story was over, the listeners, who had been held by the force of the narrator's delivery, were inclined to adopt a jeering attitude to Gilbert's eccentricities.

Stephens now stepped forward into the circle, and was greeted by nods and low exclamations. He spoke to Gilbert, who had sat down and was shading his face from the flames with an outstretched hand. "Who was the lady? I missed the first part of the story."

"A great woman-spider I was watching in my lunch hour, and a little bit of a male thing that knew no better."

"It's lucky thing we don't do our courting that way," remarked one of the men.

"Men take longer to eat up," replied Gilbert scornfully, "and, for the most part, they squeal out more about it."

"Don't get him started on women, for the Lord's sake, or we'll never hear the end of it. Spiders are enough for one evening."

Stephens had sat down close to the fire. "My word, it's cold tonight," he said. "One half of me is roasted, and the other's freezing."

"Yes, we've had it cold these last few nights and no mistake; the water bottles have been frozen."

"Tell that new Johnnie I brought up — where is he? Oh, there you are, Sherwin. You better get some extra blankets from the storekeeper — that smiling rogue over there, who'll charge you six times their proper price — or you'll be frozen stiff by the morning. We are up pretty high here, and though it's baking hot by day it's damned cold by night."

John showed his willingness to take the advice, and was led away by the storekeeper, a fat, smiling man, who, as good as his reputation, extracted the most outrageous price for the necessary blankets. After they had bargained, John took the opportunity of asking about Gilbert. "Oh, he's mad," chuckled the storekeeper. "Been in the bush so long he couldn't live anywhere else. He's gone cracked. God knows, he come from Ireland, somewhere — owns a brewery, so they say, and is worth thousands. He's gone gold-mad, just lives for the sight of

the yellow stuff round the dish, though he has no value for it . . . hasn't washed since the memory of man, and stinks like an old bush-porcupine. He's happy just flossicking around. He's his own master, and knows a damned lot about gold and tin. Knows more about tin-ores than any man in the West. Like the rest of us he lives on the hope of hitting something big and rich one day, though what he'd do with it God alone knows, I'm sure he doesn't."

For a while longer the men sat close to the fire yarning of mines and of luck that they had had, or missed. Then, as they became cold and sleepy, they went off to their tents. John, who was accustomed to sleeping in the open, lay down under a mulga-bush, rolling himself tight in his blankets. He felt glad that he was once more about to be in close contact with men. He liked the little he had seen of Stephens and was particularly glad to think of Gilbert as a member of the camp. He guessed that the observer of the loves and deaths of spiders would in all probability prove a sympathetic spirit, none the worse for his reputed madness. Certainly his talkativeness would be a contrast to Loo's silence. Of this John was glad, feeling a growing desire for the exchange of ideas.

IV

The "Magenta" had two shafts each a hundred feet in depth. Parallel galleries were now being cut through green iron-stone which was yielding two ounces of gold to the ton. This was nothing very brilliant, but Stephens had hopes of richer ore before long. John worked for a



THE DESERT

233

couple of weeks in the main shaft, shovelling broken rocks into buckets. At the end of this time he "chucked" work, being tired of the monotonous labour underground, and since he had plenty of money in his belt decided to prospect around for himself. He bought a "dolly," a mortar and a hammer, which, with a couple of pans, was sufficient paraphernalia for a start. The usual hope of all novices of finding "a colour" worth working began to kindle in his mind. For several days he wandered over the country, tapping rocks and dollying samples, but he had no sight of the much desired yellow dust round the rim of his pan. Each night when he returned to camp he heard exciting reports. A vein of ore had been struck which was yielding at first six ounces, the next night ten, and in a few days even twenty and thirty ounces to the ton. Stephens was radiant with excitement. "There is plenty of the stuff," he said, "getting better and better." He prophesied that before long the railway would be out to the camp; already labour was pouring in; scores of dust-stained bushmen come to prospect along the ridge.

John felt a burning eagerness not to be left out of the rush for success. He was surprised that he should suddenly care so much about anything. He wanted success badly, also had the good sense to realize that he would not yet be strong enough to hold his own single-handed against the gangs of rough, experience-hardened characters that poured into camp. Already he was being robbed for everything that he bought. He was afraid that he might lose a large portion of his money before being able to put it to any useful account. Although several offers of partnership had been made him by shady-looking

characters, who suspected him of possessing money which might be extracted, he had sufficient suspicion to warn him against the integrity of average human nature.

Of all the men in the camp, he could feel most confidence in Gilbert. Gilbert, he felt sure, was honest; such extravagant imagining betraying a simple mind. Although he had not seen him since the night of his first arrival, he now set off for the claim, which he was told was three miles along the ridge. He found Gilbert's tent, a ramshackle affair, red with age and dust, guarded by a shaggy dog of the same colour. A few yards distant was the high parapet of a trench. In the trench he found Gilbert. John hailed him and began to ask questions about the claim and the country.

"Yes, a good line of stuff has been here, but I've lost it. It dips down, I think. I shall have to go deeper."

"If you go deeper you'll need two workers," suggested John, "one to fill the buckets, and one to haul up."

"I shall, but in the rush that there's like to be, if what they've got in the Magenta proves as good as they think, every man's gone off his head in anticipation. The chap I had working for me is off 'fossicking' on his own. They are all after the chance of finding something for themselves." Gilbert spat scornfully.

"Don't you think they will find anything?"

"Well, they might; but there be precious few that do find anything that's lasting and good. This of mine might have a rich patch lower down. It's worth working all the time, though I expect nothing big of it."

"Would you take me on to work with you?" asked John, abruptly coming to the point.

Gilbert looked surprised at the offer, for he knew that

most labour was snapped up for work at the main shaft of the "Magenta." However, it was not for him to enquire into motives; he was in luck getting the offer. He glanced critically at John before he answered, then, as though accepting casually, "To be sure, if you want the work."

Their agreement was of the ordinary type, and the next day John started to work with Gilbert at sinking a shaft. The work was monotonous, consisting of first breaking the rock with a pick, then filling the fragments into buckets and hauling them up by a winch. At mid-day their routine was broken by the interest of testing samples. For twenty feet down they continued to find gold, but not very much; then it suddenly petered out.

Each day after the work at the shaft was done Gilbert and John would go rabbit hunting in the bush. Rag, the woolly red sheep-dog, came with them, and John would take his ax. All about the bush are scores of fallen trees which have rotted where they fell. At each hollow, fallen tree that they came to, Rag would sniff intelligently, and if there was a rabbit hiding in it, he would pause at the exact place and scratch. A few strokes of the ax, then the trunk would split and the rabbit be seized.

On these expeditions Gilbert talked fluently, telling fantastic stories of things seen and experienced. He would amuse John with extravagant accounts of animal and bird life, talking gaily and easily, though with always a touch of sarcasm and contempt for human conventions, contrasting them disadvantageously with the habits of animals. John found him an amusing companion. He was certainly not like other men. It was easy to understand his reputation for madness. This was due to his

fearlessness of human opinion. He went his way regardless, living the life he found good. Animals, he would maintain, were more sensible and worthy of respect than men. Often he pointed histories with instances of their sagacity, putting man's to shame.

In the meantime, the "Magenta" was reaching the height of its fame. Rich veins of ore had been found, which as yet showed no sign of exhaustion. Men were rushing in from all parts of the western gold-fields, too late, of course, to get any of the spoils, but hoping to find in the neighbourhood some equally rich ore-deposit. The feeling of excitement spread up and down the ridge for miles. Each day men would pause on their way at Gilbert's claim and ask questions. Gilbert would laugh at them after they had gone, and say how he would sell them his claim when he was sure there was nothing else in it, maintaining that they were fools enough to buy simply for position on top of the ridge. But in spite of his scoffing he began to get restless. When, instead of finding richer ore as he went down, his line petered out, he suggested to John that they should take a day off from their work now and then for prospecting. They could not be away much, for unless Gilbert continued to work his claim it might be "jumped." John was delighted at the idea, all enthusiasm. For a time they worked up and down the ridge, but found nothing, then one Sunday they started off for a long day-expedition across the low granite country, hoping to come upon an outcrop of ore-bearing rock.

After a long walk they came to a narrow ridge running parallel to the one they had left. They worked the whole length of it. It did not stretch far, being

not more than a mile in length, and on this account had been overlooked. After chipping off many pieces of rock, and never finding anything that was hopeful, they were deciding to go back when John saw a thin line of smoke in the distance.

"Look at that smoke," he said.

"Where?" said Gilbert, in sudden excitement. "It's a burning tree."

"Yes?" said John, not understanding.

"Well! why should a tree be burning unless as a mark? Come on."

They made toward the smoke, finding it, as Gilbert had suspected, to be a burning tree. The tree had fallen, but the stump was still smouldering.

"Some one's lit this, for certain. Work out from the centre. Notice everything you can."

Soon John heard a cry from Gilbert. He ran quickly to where he was. Gilbert stood, full of triumph, with a finger stretched, pointing. In front of him was a mulga bush with a bough broken and twisted upon itself.

"Look between here and the tree." He was down on hands and knees now. "And here are broken stones!" he exclaimed. He spat on a fractured surface, then scrutinized it. "Not much there, but the right-looking kind of stuff. Look, it's a tiny outcrop, an island." He was now breaking off from the main rock chips with his hammer, spitting on them and putting them aside.

"It's not very good on the surface; but who knows what it may be like underneath. It's the right-looking stuff. Look, it's running this way. Work along and see if you can't find any more."

John soon came on a rounded cap of rock, from which

he broke off a flake. He spat on it as he had seen Gilbert do. In the wet surface there sparkled some tiny yellow particles. He hurried to Gilbert with the fragment. The old man's eyes shone, his hawk-face wrinkled with emotion. "My God! that's all right. It's rich, though it may be small." He began chipping off other flakes, examining them. "It looks like another tiny island right away from the main ridge. Perhaps it joins up underneath; there's more lower down."

For a time they worked, chipping off flakes, putting them in their bags. Gilbert handed a stone to John. "Look there, that's better than ever. We'll peg this out tonight before that fellow who lit the fire comes back. He's a fool not to have waited; but he didn't find this rich bit."

John set to work with his ax, cutting some stout pegs, then Gilbert stepped out the limits of what he considered the extent of the ridge. He waited nervously while John drove the pegs with the head of his ax. "It's a pity to make a noise," he muttered, "though we are so far away. Men have sharp ears at a time like this." Then when the pegs were all driven, and the claim written out. "We must keep this dead quiet till the surveyor has been here. There are men who'd do anything for a chance like this, and there's that fellow who burnt the tree. I shan't feel safe till the thing's on paper, drawn out on the map. I've been fifteen years at this, and I've never seen anything that looked so rich on the surface."

John thrilled with excitement. Although he was in Gilbert's employ in work hours, they were prospecting at "off" times. He was now on equality, and knew that

by the law of the bush he had half-share in anything that was found.

When they returned to camp, they made a long circuit so as to approach from another direction. On their way they passed near a group of men who were out rabbit hunting. "Walk slowly," said Gilbert, slacking his pace. "If they see us pacing along they'll think we've found something, and might track us." He stopped, and began to shake a bush, and then walked round it, peering at the ground.

"What's that for?" asked John, amused.

"They'll think it's that damned old fool, Gilbert, flossicking around over his stick-insects and daddy-long-legs, trying to catch all the fleas in the camp."

John laughed, and they strolled on slowly, though it was difficult, with their minds so vividly at work, not to quicken their pace. At the camp, Gilbert insisted that they should set down to the commonplace task of preparing their food. John was all for "dollying" the samples, but Gilbert would not allow it. "If we were to 'dolly' them now, we should have half a dozen fellows sniffing round. Listen, they'd say, there's Gilbert 'dolly-ing' some stones after he's been out all day. He must have found something. No, we'll take them to the shaft tomorrow morning, then have a look at them."

John had to submit to the reason of this argument. He became infected by Gilbert's caution. His excitement became intense through being controlled. That night he lay awake thinking of the new claim, building schemes upon the wonderful possibilities of success. The thought of Mrs. Cray, from long habit, mingled with the

other thoughts. There was still pain and regret woven about his picture of her, but now there was new hope and interest. His thoughts roamed back again to the burning tree, to the broken and twisted mulga-branch, and to the four stout pegs driven into the red, virgin soil.

v

All the phases of excitement within the bounds of discovery and possession crowded upon one another in the next week. First there was the "dollying" of specimens in the early morning, the washing of the broken rock, and the bright rim of gold particles which stretched a third of the way round the pan's circumference. Gilbert bent above them, crooning with delight, shaking the specks of yellow metal to and fro amid the black grains of biotite. There followed a journey down the line and back; the surveyor arrived; then, the final triumph of their hopes, the new claim was marked out in red and white upon a map. All had gone well, no one had suspected them, their pegs had not been moved, and none of the threatening eventualities, which they had imagined, had occurred. Now in all security they could openly go to the new claim. The old claim was sold. All paraphernalia, together with good money's worth of stores, was packed on to a cart, and John, in the first triumph of ownership, drove across the flats of granite to the site of the new claim.

During the first few days several men walked over to have a look at the ridge that Gilbert had found. Among them came Stephens and two of his companions. "Well, Gilbert, you've struck a rich patch at last," he said, after "dollying" several samples. "Of course, there's

no telling how much there is, but what there is is good."

Gilbert was too old a hand to boast or to seem optimistic, he knew how that the fine gold particles could tempt a man to raise high hopes, then suddenly disappear into black rock like the powdery tail of a comet into the surrounding night. "Ah, nothing like the 'Magenta,'" he replied. "But that's the sort of luck that a man should meet once in a hundred years."

Stephens shrugged his shoulders, pleased at the tribute. "Oh! who knows?" he said generously, though he felt pretty certain that his luck was not to be rivalled. In this he was right, the "Magenta" is still famous in the history of the West, while "Burnt Tree," as they called it, though it had its moment of splendour, is long forgotten.

The first month gave to Gilbert and John their best yields. There was plenty of ore within two feet of the surface. The gold was well distributed. Daily the number of the sacks of ore grew greater. Each sack they could estimate as being worth about five pounds, so were able to count their fortune as it came warm from the earth. As the extent of work grew, they employed at first three men and later double that number. Within a couple of months they had come to the limit of the small island outcrop. As they sank shafts and drove galleries to deeper levels the flush of gold proved, as Gilbert had feared, faithless, losing itself in occasional sprays of fine dust in the less acid rock foundation. At the end of three months, the gold-bearing rock had become so scarce that they discharged their labour, though they continued to work on themselves. "Burnt Tree" had proved typical of the district: a small, rich claim

which was petering out and was now almost dead. Gilbert and John had made a profit of between five and six thousand pounds. The exact sum would not be known till the ore had been through the mills.

During the time that the two partners had been working at the mine they had come to understand each other as only men who live, sleep and eat together out in the wilds, can understand the value of comradeship. The difference of age and experience seemed somehow to count as a small thing. They discovered a strange affinity founded upon experience. From the first, Gilbert had perceived in John something that was unusual. There was a quality both naive and serious, a reserve which sometimes betrayed itself by eager flutterings, suggesting a desire for closer intimacy, but which drew back with a childish show of suspicion. Gilbert could guess that John had plunged deep into life, and had come bruised from the contact. He was also interested to find how limited was John's experience, and how unknown to him were the ordinary forms of human life. Once when they were sitting before the blaze of an evening fire he asked John who it was who had taught him his wide knowledge of woodcraft. "Have you been with the natives?" he said. "For it's not often a white man has your eyes for seeing."

"Yes, I've known natives."

"Up on some back station? Perhaps that's where you've come from?"

John felt a sudden impulse to tell Gilbert some of his story, feeling an attraction for his companion's strange and simple personality. "I was on an island up on the north-west coast with my father and mother and a black boy till I was seventeen," he said.

"Were you all alone, you three, with the black?"

"Yes."

Gilbert appeared much interested, seeking to take in the significance of this solitary upbringing. "What have you done since?"

"Wandered about."

"It's a good life," said Gilbert meditatively, "that, and to keep quit of the bonds that bind a man. What made your father go and live in so solitary a spot?"

"He had killed a man," said John, with a frankness that seemed surprising to himself. He somehow knew that Gilbert was absolutely to be trusted.

Gilbert was silent, though he took the information with no show of surprise, then after a pause: "Perhaps it was a blessing to him to be quit of it all."

"That's what he told me," said John, pleased at Gilbert's understanding. "My father trusted me. He was very fond of my mother; they live there still. One day when I have all the money I want, I shall go back and see them."

"You think he'll be proud of your money?" asked Gilbert, with an amused irony.

"It's something."

"Oh yes, it's something, and where did you learn to read and write and get that thoughtful air you carry about with you? Have you picked that up since you left your island?"

John reddened, feeling a pleasure in Gilbert's questioning and a desire which had lately been growing to tell something of his story. "I went up pearling," he said. "I'll tell you what happened. I'd like to tell you, though no one else knows."

He told his story simply, while Gilbert listened. Once or twice he had to pause to keep his voice steady, he was very anxious to do that. Details he avoided, as likely to cause him too much emotion. He spoke in broad statements. At the end Gilbert looked at him kindly. "You've had better luck than many, my boy, and worse too, in a way," he said, by way of comment. "By God, you have." Then with a smile, "And now you are after gold for a change?"

"Yes."

"Should we make some money at the claim, as looks likely, how would you spend it?"

"I shall travel and see the world, and see the towns. . . . But I shall stay here till I have all I want."

"Why do you want to go to the towns? Haven't you seen enough?"

"I have seen a little of one town . . ."

"They are all much the same. Some are bigger than others and more wicked. What should you want money to go to the towns for?"

John thought for a short while. "I want money because it's what other men want," he said.

Gilbert laughed. "That's a good reason, too. I've spent more than half my life fighting for it because of that. Now I don't care. Oh, yes, I make money, but I don't care. I've got the habit of it," he smiled. "My one bad habit — that, and the love of gold."

In the words, John could read more than their surface value. Gilbert was in earnest, and smiling with an odd embarrassment; he had made a confession which to himself had hardly been admitted. John could guess in the silence which followed that the love of gold was not only

Gilbert's one bad habit, but the sole remaining bond which bound him to the ordinary life of men. After a while he continued:

"I've kept myself, one way and another, since I was a brat of ten years old. I had a bad mother. At home I couldn't stand it, so I ran away. On a farm I worked at fourpence a week, driving the plough horses. They gave me little enough food; often I would walk along crying of the cold with my belly empty, poor devil of a kid, and the old swine of a farmer flinging stones at me if I didn't drive the horses fast enough. When I was older and strong I left the farm and took to navvying on the new railroad. I had better money then for my labour, but I lived hard. I slept out in the wet and cold, night after night, yet I kept my health. I got strength for myself, and loved my own freedom. Ah, I grew a man then. I could work. The women didn't let me forget that I was a strong, well-liking fellow. I was free, I didn't see the great danger that there is in women. I would play with them, flattered, like a child with a new toy, not knowing the fear of them.

"Then I went to the town. I had always had a want for learning. At a big newspaper-office where I worked I picked up how to read and write. I seemed made to get on those days. As you said just now—I wanted money because other men wanted it. I got it too.

"At twenty-five I married. My wife was a big, strong woman as tall as myself with a great mass of hair. We lived small at first, but always growing, changing from one house to another. I lost my freedom. I was being changed against my will. I didn't want to change. It was all struggle between us. I was fighting then, as

I'd never thought to fight: for my life, for more than life. I learnt then the danger in women. Sex is the curse of our lives. . . . My wife had nine children, five of them died. When I was thirty-eight my wife died. She had had her children too close, so the doctor said, and that was what had killed her. At that time I was junior partner in a brewery business. I had made my way to success, though every year I was losing freedom. . . . My God! I hated all that life, but was not able to get out of it. When my wife died, I seemed able to know for a moment where I stood, but the business was always claiming me. I had money, and after a while every one took it for granted I should marry again. For four years I kept free, but at forty-two I married a young wife. It was her prettiness, her smallness, her tiny hands and feet — she was so unlike the first." Gilbert paused and spat into the fire. "I cared for her more than for any other woman I've ever set eyes on. That made me weak towards her, and there was the same struggle, but worse. Everything in me was changing and being twisted and rounded off, blurred. It was hell. She had no soul, was like a flower, empty and naked, and no shame, with tears, and little soft ways to make a fool of me. Sometimes I would let fly at her, and curse her and go off, letting everything go; but all the while I was away, I was tortured by the thought of some other man making up to her. So I'd come back and carry on the business. I was senior partner then, and a rich man. I kept in the town and never went out to my old haunts. I was ashamed to meet with my old self out of doors.

"Then one day, after three years of it, I had the good



THE DESERT

247

sense to clear off. I left everything to my wife; took a hundred pounds and came out here. I came straight up to the gold-fields. I seemed to know that they claimed me. Sometimes I've worked at tin up at Pilbura, but it's really gold. I love the sight of this yellow dust. For fifteen years I've been free again, as I was when a young man, free of the curse, do you understand?

"It's a good life!" he exclaimed, looking up at John with a smile of contentment. "I send all the money home. I don't need it. My wife was always one for a show. She spends it, but I never let her know where I am. My word!" he laughed. "If she saw me now, red with dust, she'd never own me. A dirty old groper — well, thank God!"

"Do you send all your money back and never know what happens to it?" asked John, not quite knowing how to comment on Gilbert's story.

"Yes, all but what I need for living, and that's little enough. I have no use for it. What I like to see is the dust in the pan. First in the broken stone you can see it, it's a fine sight; then when it's broken in the pan with the water, and you know that the gold may be there hidden." Gilbert produced the rocking, swaying movement with his hands. He stroked the flat of his thumb over imaginary broken particles. "First the greater and the bigger lumps come off; now the smaller ones, and underneath is the fine black dust all wet with the gold sparkling in it." He smiled at John apologetically at his own extravagance. "One time I used to dream about it. I do sometimes now, and every year the love of it gets stronger."

John laughed in sympathy.

"It doesn't blind me any longer. I don't keep the money it brings. I don't want it. It's just the gold I love the sight of. . . . There's not a man who doesn't live by some delusion, and not many of them see the other side of their own minds. With animals it's different, they just live without reason or delusion. Everything is simple. But man, he understands or half understands. Things have grown up. He wants their measurements, and sets values on all his pleasures. Sex, that's what gives everything a twist. That's the curse. Women don't understand; in that they are like animals. Simpler. But the curse is on them too. It breaks their bodies, not their spirit."

"Sometimes their spirit," said John.

"Yes, but not often — a man it destroys."

"Unless he runs away?" John questioned doubtfully.

Gilbert nodded. "Then he might find something to fill the empty place, money or gold, or the naked pleasure of shaking out the next pan full . . . Why, I'm tired of this thing we're at here, already. I want something new. This is a great country: unexplored and full of metals — miles of it untrodden. That's where I want to be." Gilbert waved his arm widely towards the East.

There in the lilac and mauve distance of that great unexplored country John also had dreams of wandering; for him it was not to be the end and all-sufficing climax of experience, but the beginning. He could understand Gilbert — this old man wearied with the distractions of materialism, though alive with the spirit of freedom — could sympathize with his desire for renunciation and the untrammelled liberty of poverty, while he himself was feeling the promptings of power, ripening for adven-

ture among mankind. His strength was growing within him. He had the capacity to gauge something of the adventure of life. The sex impulse he recognized as something profoundly dangerous, with a danger that might show itself in almost any direction. Perhaps it was the curse of life, as Gilbert had said. His instinct would make him cautious in future, but youth and power were pulsing in his veins with new assurance. In his first contact with the complex life of the mainland he had proved himself a failure and a weakling. When the time came for him to go again into the world, he wished to meet mankind with the conscious knowledge of success.

VI

During the months that the partners worked together there had grown between them a close interchange of thought. Gilbert found satisfaction in having a companion who would listen with understanding to his philosophy of life. To be considered mad by the men in the camp was no great hardship, but it was gratifying to find a sanction for the wisdom in his madness. He felt a pleasure in justifying himself to the younger man. His self-esteem was able to grow, as the picture drawn by himself — a free spirit, a voluntary renouncer of the world — took definite shape before John's eyes.

In the life of each succeeding day, the world of their experience was common. To both men the silent and soft expanses of the bush was a home adequate to satisfy all temperate needs of the spirit. In the presence of the untamed life of plant and animal, there grew up a spontaneous understanding. Gilbert chatted of the small things that long observation had made part of his life,

and John could trace the personal thoughts which flickered in his companion's brain. Out in the bush on these walks together, Gilbert would often talk for hours on end: an easy wandering monologue, which John would listen to with an amused interest, following the thoughts and back-thoughts, so hastily succeeding each other: "See the holes of the bardi-grubs in the roots of that bush yonder. Have you ever noticed that the grubs that live in the mulga are sweeter to taste than the big pink ones out of the yarra? Perhaps you've never eaten bardi-grubs? There have been times when I've been glad to. They taste best cooked by the side of a fire. You can catch them by putting a rough stem of grass or spinifex up their holes and twisting it round. The grub will be tickled on his backside and come bucketing out backwards with an important, swaggering air, like an old gentleman out of a bank, with his pockets full of notes. He's fine, pale, like ivory, and smooth, with little yellow breathing holes down each side, like the port-holes of a ship, each with its brass fittings. Now put him down carefully by the side of some hot ashes. He stretches out to twice his usual length, and when he boils, he pops; then he tastes all crisp at one end and soft at the other, like almond-cream running into fried parsley. You can eat them raw, but they flip so much from side to side, that I've no fancy for their dying struggles between my lips, being more tender-hearted than Almighty God. By this time, though, I should fancy He's dead, or gone sick from eating the same kind of grub over and over again. . . . They make a fine moth, too, in the spring: green, with big wings hanging down, all limp over their backs when they first come out from the

wood. . . ." He would chatter for hours, half to himself, half to John, with an occasional look and smile in his direction.

The time passed pleasantly. John came to be very fond of Gilbert, finding a relish in his passing references to a world of thought as yet so unexplored. All this he loved. He could understand Gilbert's contempt for the world that he had left, his open cynicism for the delusion of men and his own obsession for the glittering gold-dust. These things John could feel were adequate and in place, but they were not sufficient for his own growing needs. With the consciousness of power to direct his own course he desired the companionship of younger men. Sometimes he would be tired of Gilbert's conversation and walk over to the "Magenta" camp. There he could talk of the growing township. By this time the town of Magenta was half built, and the rail from Tharamecka completed. Hundreds of prospectors, wages-men, and sandal-wood cutters poured past the railhead to spread out over the newly opened country. Among the new arrivals John met a young fellow from the south, obviously new to the fields, whose appearance of honest ingenuousness marked him out from the commercial and experience-lined faces that were the usual type.

Robert Dixon had lived the typical life of the son of a small prosperous farmer. His father's farm was on the Marget River in amongst the big "yarra" forests of the south. In that land of sleepy shade and sunshine he had passed an uneventful boyhood. He had grown restless under the pleasant monotony, and at last after a struggle against his father's authority gained permission to go wandering for adventure out into the world.

John had liked him at first sight. They had talked together, and Dixon had come back to "Burnt Tree" camp where he had stayed for a night. After this their friendship quickly grew up. They took days off, wandering in the bush with their hammers and bags for samples of stone. Gilbert sometimes came with them, but often they would go alone.

At the end of four months it became obvious to Gilbert that there was not much more gold to be taken out of the "Burnt Tree" claim. He suggested that they should sell the claim, the position of which had some value, and the ore already extracted as a single lot. They approached Stephens with the suggestion, and after some bargaining agreed to the sale for five thousand five hundred pounds. This saved the arduous process of seeing the ore through the mills, and left each of them with two thousand five hundred in pocket after all expenses had been paid. "There was no fortune in that," Gilbert remarked, "but still, it was not so bad."

For some days they remained in the camp, then Gilbert suggested a fresh start. It was not till the suggestion came that John realized that he did not wish to bury himself once more in the bush with Gilbert. He felt he wanted the warmth of some kindred enthusiasm. He wanted for companion a younger spirit, some one who could share with him his dreams of fortune and power. "No, I shall wait here for a bit," he had said.

Gilbert, who understood at once, smiled genially. "Well, good luck to you. I see you're for the towns and all the world of folly. Good luck."

John wrung the hard, red hand held out to him. A

feeling of affection, that was almost painful, for this lonely man claimed by the yellow dust of his washing-pan, contracted his heart; and yet, as with Loo, he was glad to say "good-bye." He felt that he was parting with a stage of his life that was for ever past. Now he must live in the warmth of hopes, new born, firmly rooted in the consciousness of power.

VII

Not many days after Gilbert had wandered off into the bush with his bundle over his shoulder, John bought a horse and cart that he and Dixon might make some long prospecting expedition. John arranged to pay all expenses of outfit, stores, etc., and, since he was the pioneer, and by now the experienced bushman, it was agreed that three-quarters of any find, that either of them made, should fall to him. With a horse and cart they would be able to carry material for a long expedition. They planned to follow up a line of water-holes which John had discovered leading eastward. From time to time they would, of course, have to return for more stores, but would be fairly free to make deep explorations into the surrounding country.

When the two young men came to the end of the track, which led outward from the town of Magenta and some eight miles deep in the bush stopped abruptly, they both felt a thrill of pleasure at plunging into unknown country. "Out ahead of us," said John, "there is a land which, perhaps, has never been trodden by white men. There'll be natives, of course, but only a few. There's just miles of flat bush like this for further than we can possibly go."

"Well, I trust to you to find the way back," laughed Dixon, "and to talk to the natives, if they come spearing us."

"All right, Bob, don't be anxious. I've been in this sort of country for more than two years. I'm pretty sure by this time. I can feel my direction, just as Gilbert can."

"I'll learn it too before long, I expect, but it's so different from the big-treed country down south. In the forest there is usually a blaze or something to guide one. Here the whole land is so flat and lonely, and still, except for those 'cock-eyed' winds that are always dodging about."

"Yes, it is lonely," said John, "but you get to like it, I expect. I can't fancy any forests being as beautiful as this."

"Oh! you wouldn't say that if you slept out in the forests as I have, and woke in the early morning and lain on your back looking up the great pink and yellow stem of a tree that rises a hundred feet clear without a branch; and then seen the sunlight come softly through the leaves on the spreading fan-shaped branches, dappling the dark patches of bark."

"Is it all forest down there?" asked John. "I've seen plenty of trees in the north, but nothing very tall."

"No, there are big clearings where there are homesteads, and wide stretches of grass-lands and sometimes marsh, but there are miles of huge yarra trees that have never had an ax near them."

"Have you lived there always?"

"Yes, till a month ago."

John remembered his own experience on Kanna Island



THE DESERT

255

and his urgent desire to escape into the world. Dixon was much his own age, perhaps a little older; but John felt that his seniority was inevitably decided by the weight of several years of experience. "I suppose your people have always lived there?" he said, after a pause.

"Well, I'm the third generation. My mother's father was one of the first settlers who came out from England. The whole country then looked like this bush does to us. It was wild, with swarms of natives. The white men, and some of them had families with them, like my grandfather, landed from their ships as best they could and lived for a while just where they landed, on a narrow strip of the coast."

"Tell me about it," said John. "Were they the first white men on the mainland?"

"Yes, among the first. Of course, I've only heard stories," Bob apologized. "I know they had difficulty in making friends with the natives. They lived on what they could shoot of kangaroos and emus, of which there were plenty, and flour they had from the ships. After a while they made friends with the natives and built huts just over the sand-dunes. Then they brought their stock ashore. They had brought cows and goats in the ships with them. Some of them began to spread inland, but the difficulty was to find water and good pasture. The way they found the farm where my grandfather and mother lived, and which my Uncle Hastie has now, is the story which is always told. The farm is called 'Cattle-chosen,' and is quite close to our place. When they were all living down on the beach together, one of the cows got loose and was lost. Some time later there was a big bush fire which spread right down to the beach



and burnt all the settlement. They had then to look for a new place where there was pasture unburnt. My Uncle Hastie, who was a boy then, went out with a native, who said he knew the country. They wandered in the bush for some time and at last came on a green valley with long grass; and there they found the lost cow with a calf that had been born, both of them quite well. That's where they moved to; and have stayed ever since."

"So that's why it's called 'Cattle-chosen,'" commented John. "There was luck in that."

Bob talked on, pleased to talk of the country and the home that he had left. John received a picture of the farm life with its pleasant monotony of existence. It was something very different from anything he had yet encountered on the mainland. He felt attracted by his friend's easy account of mother, brothers and sisters. Farm life on the Margaret River must be something very pleasant, different in its atmosphere of homely prosperity, from anything he had experienced.

As the days and weeks passed and the two friends wandered over virgin stretches of bush country they became impelled towards a close intimacy by the still influence of the land which stretched, always the same, always wide-eyed, with a strange youthfulness, on all sides. They both talked of their past lives, though John forbore to mention his relationship with Mrs. Cray or any of his more intimate experiences. Though he had spoken to Gilbert of these things, he now preferred to remain silent. It was pleasant to let life take its surface value. There was always the pleasure of the search, the dollying of samples, and in the evenings or early morning the long

and patient stalks, rifle in hand, after the wary bush turkeys.

The ridges of schist, that first they came to, were quite barren of ore, though they worked thoroughly the various cross dykes of black iron-stone. They struck further eastward, coming on small deposits, but nothing good enough for their hopes. John was not to be satisfied with something small, but was looking for a big, rich thing that would make it worth while to bring out the railway. So always they wandered on and on, covering wide stretches of country, happy in the open life, becoming daily more the enamoured slaves of the bush. "I shall be a regular 'groper' before I'm thirty," John had said. "I can understand Loo and Gilbert; but I shan't really be like that. I want to go everywhere and see things, and know what life is really like on the mainland."

A find big enough, at first showing, to satisfy John's estimate of what was worth working, was not found till after an eighteen months' wandering. Then one day, at the furthest limit of a long expedition, they came on a white-capped ridge of acid-rock in which were veins of gold-bearing quartz. There was plenty of rock, and the veins seemed wide and deep.

John and Dixon made a big claim, including all the cap of the ridge. Soon they employed six men to work under them. The number grew as the shafts deepened. The claim looked as if it would be good, and although nothing like so brilliant as the "Magenta," it promised to justify itself. John didn't mind how far he plunged in expenditure. He believed now in his luck. It had been a long time coming, he felt, but now it was sure.

"White Rock" developed steadily. It was not very

rich, but there was plenty of it. Very soon the two partners received offers which, though they considered them inadequate, were by no means uncomplimentary.

The life of sudden excitement, after the long months of search, the travelling to and fro between Magenta and the mine, involved by his position of boss, the congratulations of old acquaintances and their ill-concealed envy, and, best of all, the eagerly expected news at the end of each journey, tasted as the sweet wine of life. This was the success of which he had dreamed. New hopes and activities quickly sprang into being. Once end of each journey, tasted as the sweet wine of life, and had lost; now with the riches given by gold and power within his grasp he would take the sweet things that life offered.



CHAPTER VIII

THE BEATEN TRACK

I

FAR out into the desert wherever the hunt for gold has led the way, the gay superficiality of civilized life has thrust out colonies which, regardless of any quality inherent in the land that they have invaded, flourish with all the arrogance of commercial success. At such mining centres as Mt. Gerard, Redsand and Garloo, there exist, as yet in rather a primitive state, but nevertheless with the usual self-importance, all the etceteras of society life. There are tennis parties, dances, clubs, lending library, cinemas and the rest; each on a small scale, but following, as tradition has ordained, the accustomed round, and thus producing the artificial sparkle so necessary to keep up the spirits of the white man when placed amidst surroundings whose peculiar significance he does not wish to understand, or even to see.

Mt. Gerard, which is at the junction of the lines to Tharamecka and Redsand, is the largest town on the Lyell Gold-fields. Here are situated the large crushing mills to which ore is brought in from the country round. In the town itself there are Government offices, a mining school, several banks — also some large and comfortable-looking houses, the property of millowners, Government officials and bank managers. There is a big hotel with

electric light and other modern luxuries, also with extensive tennis-courts of excellent quality made of the hard cement taken from the nests of white ants. The hotel, named "The St. Quintin," after one of the oldest mines, has also a large ballroom, hung about with mirrors and illuminated globes, screened by glass pendants. Close to the tennis-courts there is a garden, whose watering alone is said to cost five pounds a week. This one green oasis, in the midst of red dust, is enclosed by a high wall. In the garden there is a green lawn, famous in the neighbourhood, also several English plants which are pointed out for the admiration of visitors.

Besides the "St. Quintin" there are three other hotels and several coffee palaces. There is a double row of glaringly new and ugly shops which line a street planted on either side with pepper trees. Beyond the main street are others less pretentious, usually peopled by numbers of goats, who seem to have eaten every leaf of cactus or dry grass, which might once have graced the landscape, and now out of sheer ennui are eating the coloured labels off discarded jam tins. On the outskirts of the town there is a long line of dust pyramids made of the minute fragments of rock which the mills have crushed. This chain of hills is constantly varying in shape and size. It is added to by the continuous working of the mills and depleted by the hot winds of summer. These sweep away the dust in dense clouds, whirling it through the town, forcing it into the smallest cracks and crannies.

When the weather is not too hot and the winds are not blowing, life is by no means dull at Mt. Gerard. The hotels are usually full. There is plenty of money, plenty of women, and consequently no lack of entertainment.



THE BEATEN TRACK 261

The chief life of society is centred round the two clubs, the "Blue Star" and the "W. A." These, like the "St. Quintin," are patronized chiefly by the wealthier men who represent, not only Mt. Gerard, but all the shifting population of the gold-fields.

When John arrived at Mt. Gerard to see the first consignment of ore from "White Rock" through the mills, he looked in his dusty blue shirt and trousers the typical bushman. He had been five years wandering in the desert since, clinging to the underside of a railway coach he had left Rupertstown. In that time he had known solitude and its healing quality. Also he had come to know himself in the limitations of his own power. He had tasted friendship and success, and was now his own master, boss of a prosperous concern.

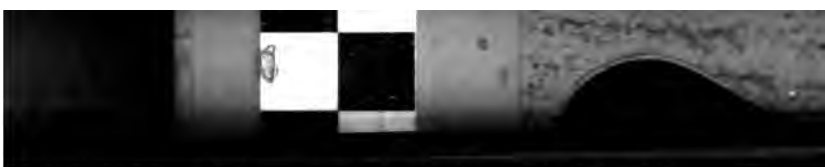
On his journey down the line, he had anticipated with pleasure the life that was before him. He knew that when once he began seeing his ore through the mills it would take up his time both night and day, so he had purposely come ten days in advance. Stephens, who had been out on a visit to "White Rock" and had lately become intimate with John, had urged him to come early so that he might be introduced to some friends of Stephens, influential fellows on the gold-fields, also to some pretty girls.

When John arrived at the station, Stephens was there to meet him. "I must take you round to my tailor's," he said, after their first greetings, "and see that you are fitted out with some decent clothes. You can't stay at the 'St. Quintin' in that rig. All right, I can lend you something till you are ready." At the tailor's John ordered the necessary white silk suits, then went with

Stephens to the hotel, where he enjoyed thoroughly the change to sudden luxury from the rough life of the bush. Stephens was greatly amused at his ingenuous pleasure over the hot and cold water laid on in the bedrooms. He chaffed John over his interest in electric lamp globes and their remote switches, which still carried a remembrance of the first night on the mainland at Flynn's Inn.

At dinner that evening, John was introduced to the other guests, who all seemed to know each other and Stephens. There were about fifteen men, some of them residents in Mt. Gerard, who as a regular practice took their meals at the hotel, and about the same number of women. Among the latter was a Mrs. Vance and three pretty daughters. They all talked gaily and rather loudly, seeming thoroughly at home, very conscious of their good looks and smart clothes. Mr. Vance was manager of one of the banks. He and his family were regular residents at the hotel.

John was excited at the presence of so many people, yet not in the least abashed. He felt master of himself, being full of confidence. All these people knew (and if they didn't know already, they soon would) that he was the successful owner of "White Rock." He was proud of what he had achieved, and was pleasantly stimulated by the thought of coming to know all these people. There was no reason why he should feel embarrassed. His early pictures of human relations received at Ruperttown and printed for always upon his brain, now formed a kind of sombre background which enhanced the present gay picture. If terror and despair moved always as the undercurrent of life, it was fortunate that they did not



THE BEATEN TRACK 263

often show themselves. He could be thankful for the bright superficial talk that buzzed around him.

The women were particularly interesting. Their beauty came almost as a shock, being so different from the austere, veiled quality of the bush. The bright-coloured, soft, flimsy materials in which they were dressed gave him pleasure, so also did the thought of limbs and bodies enclosed in so delicate a substance. Both sight and thought were wonderfully attractive, but a deep suspicion, not to be eradicated by years of solitude, warned him of danger. The warm pulse of his youth answered this warning, telling him that such suspicion was in no way a barrier against life, but rather a weapon, a shield to guard him from wounds. He was only vulnerable to pain and such injuries as he had received, when mind and soul were open in the rich act of pouring out all their most cherished possessions. Now that he had but material things to offer, he felt very strong behind the steel shield of his disenchantment. Women, of course, were wonderful in their fresh beauty. He did not wish to deny them anything, but he would not let the generosity of his own imagination clothe them with riches that were themselves imaginary. Men who forwent women were either fools or cowards. He remembered Gilbert as neither fool nor coward, but then he had had his experience. In him, renunciation was ripe; it was no matter of lame paws. Women, he felt, held in their small soft hands the very pulses of life itself. They were man's strongest, most dangerous, most subtle antagonists. Blood, brain, and heart told him how much was to be gained in that struggle: the completing of the male sex in him, the justification of his stand upon life's citadel.

His past losses made him in this respect more confident. He had now the world's riches, nothing so very precious, even if lost, but enough, fully enough to offer. That he should experience love was a possibility so remote that it did not enter his mind. It was sufficient, that in the jolly laughing bodies of the girls near him, there was attraction and the same strong wave of life that pulsed in his own veins.

John sat during dinner next to Hilda Vance, a pretty girl of twenty-four, with a white skin, dark hair and a vivacious manner. "It must be very splendid for you to be boss of a big thing like 'White Rock.' Usually only old men have these honours. It must be very nice to feel it all belongs to yourself."

"It isn't all mine," said John. "I have a partner."

"Yes, but you have the bigger share, and all the responsibility. Where is your partner? He's quite young, too, isn't he?"

"He's stayed up at 'White Rock.' I came down, you see, to see the ore through the mills."

"But you've got some days first to look round, haven't you? This is our gay time, before the hot weather comes and those awful winds. I expect you look forward to some tennis after your long time in the bush."

"I can't play tennis," admitted John.

"Well, then, you must learn. It's the greatest fun on earth. You can dance, though, I'm sure. There's going to be a dance here the day after to-morrow. And next week there will be a kangaroo hunt. That's best fun of all; you are bound to like that."

"Oh, yes, I'm in for everything there is. You and



THE BEATEN TRACK 265

your friends I hope will be kind enough to teach me how to play tennis and dance. I know how to ride."

"But fancy you not knowing how to play tennis. Where had you been to before you went gold seeking?"

"I'd been up on the North Coast after pearls since I was eighteen. Before that I lived away on an island, and never saw anybody."

Hilda Vance had already spotted John as some one interesting and unusual. "You must have had a strange life," she said. "Then have you never been at a place like this before?"

"No, this is my first experience."

"Oh well, you will enjoy it. There is so much to find out."

John could see in Hilda's bright and frank manner that there was a good deal that she had already found out. He liked her and was attracted towards a certain hardness of fibre that he could discern in her prettiness. He was pleased by the ingenuous way in which she looked at him, as though he were an interesting specimen to be judiciously played with, led out, made to display himself in the warmth of her smiles. She was a nice girl, he thought: honest and old enough to be experienced in the ways of the world. He was lucky in finding so pleasant a companion. He felt that the world was to her a jolly place full of pleasing adventure. Her garden of Eden was rich with pleasant fruit, towards which she would stretch out her pretty hands as the fancy took her. She had, too, a hard glitter, which pleased him. It was sufficient to banish all fears from his mind of a possible mawkishness.

The next day Hilda took him in hand to teach him tennis; but, as John expressed it, he was a mug at the game and soon gave it up. They went then to look at some horses, kept at the hotel, and finished up by having a ride across the bush together. Hilda rode well and with obvious pleasure. She won John's admiration by the way she put her pony over the wide stems of fallen trees.

"It's awfully nice of you to give up your tennis when you are so good at it," he said.

"Oh well, riding is equally good fun. I feel it doesn't matter what I do so long as this fine weather lasts, and it's not too hot."

John felt complimented in her having chosen him as her companion. It gave him an additional confidence in himself, for there were several other men who were good tennis players, who were anxious enough to pay her attentions, had she wished for them as partners.

In the afternoon, during the heat of the day, Hilda went to rest. John sat in the spacious smoking-room talking to the men and sometimes thinking of Hilda, getting from the thought the sensation caused by a warm patch of sunshine shining upon his life. It was a comfortable and gratifying sensation, without any of the pain of being in love.

The next morning John rode again with Hilda. They found plenty to talk about, though their conversation was made up of trivialities. It pleased him to follow the quick workings of her mind, to see the eager way she flitted from subject to subject. From the first, there had been between them a sharp sex consciousness. They were both good-looking, clean-limbed young animals,

thoroughly alive. All the physics of spontaneous attraction were at work. John found himself talking sometimes quite fatuously. He didn't care. He was not really fatuous; he was talking, not for the sake of what he was saying, but for the sake of getting near by an indirect, yet wholly natural process, to the half-veiled, half-naked substance of the girl's life, which at sudden vital moments touched him with throbbing intensity. After such momentary pulses he was left, eager and baffled, on the far side of her amused laughter.

That evening was the evening of the dance. John proved as big a failure as a dancer as he had as tennis player, and after the first few attempts he gave it up. Hilda sat out with him some of the time, though she danced some of the dances. Half-way through the evening they walked out together into the garden. Hilda was very gay, stimulated by the dancing, shining with the full light of her vitality. John was abashed and rather silent, feeling a need to express by some adequate embrace his admiration for the warm glow of her. They walked round the garden, Hilda talked gaily and irreverently; John was silent. They looked at the flowers planted from English seed and pretended to admire them, though their thoughts were elsewhere. They then looked at the pipes and all the apparatus for spraying the lawn. "It's terribly expensive in this dry land. Just think, five pounds a week for this lawn, but it's worth it. It's nice having a green place to walk in."

"Oh, damn the lawn sprays. It's you I'm thinking about," laughed John abruptly. He put his hands on her shoulders and drew her towards him.

For a moment and more than a moment, she accepted his kiss. Then, laughing, she broke away and ran back to the hotel.

II

For the rest of the dance, Hilda perversely avoided John, and not till the party were breaking up did she speak to him again. She then ran up to him, and plucking from her dress a portion of a spray of nigella blossom, that she was wearing, said, laughing: "Wear this to prove your faithfulness. I shan't say good night to you. You don't deserve it." She turned away with a smile full of gay wickedness, that made John want to run after her and make her explain herself.

While he was putting the nigella into his buttonhole, Stephens happened to pass near by. "I see you're favoured," he said. "Those flowers were Mr. Fryett's ewe-lambs. He had no end of bother rearing them. They were a special gift to Miss Vance, so I know who's given them to you. You had better not let him see you wearing them. . . . She's a damned pretty girl, intelligent, too. Her mother doesn't know what character that girl's got. If she doesn't marry her off soon, she had better look out for squalls. That sort of girl's a modern type—particularly Australian, I might say, with ideas in her head, and I daresay the courage to act on them."

John went with Stephens into the smoking-room, and for a while they smoked. When they turned in, they were the last to leave the room.

The long corridor of bedrooms, when John reached it, was dark and deserted. When he came to unlock his

door, he found that there was an obstruction in his keyhole. He held his candle lower. Sticking out of the keyhole was one of Mr. Fryett's nigellas. John's heart gave a bound. He stood for a moment while the idea took hold of his mind. Then he looked down the long corridor. There was not a sound, every one was shut in for the night. Silently he then walked down the passage. Four doors further down were two blossoms dropped on the mat. John blew out his candle, went to the door and opened it. Inside, the room was lit only by the dim light from the windows. As he closed the door he heard the rustle of a moving figure, then soft hands were laid on his neck. "Clever boy," said Hilda. "That's why you didn't deserve saying 'good night' to."

III

With Hilda the days passed quickly. John was in no hurry for his consignment of ore, which at first he had looked forward so much to receiving. Each day he found Hilda's companionship more charming, and her self more intimate. She seemed so frank and direct. What surprised him, was that she made no sort of claim upon him. Willing to accept the present with light-hearted cheerfulness, she left the future to take care of itself. "Men aren't always fussing about what is going to happen to them next year. If women want freedom they must be thorough," she had said, and once when they were riding together far out in the bush, "Most girls I know are only fit to get married. They are such cowards. I dare say I shall get married some day, but not yet. I have such a deep suspicion of men. Once they are married they set to work grimly to become husbands. I've watched

them. They forget that their wives are women, not only women from a man's point of view, but from their own, and that they are thinking just twenty times as fast as the average man."

"Do men change so much when they are married?" asked John.

"I should just think they do. The whole attitude alters. They get full of assumptions, and the knowledge of legal rights. What has the law got to do with it?"

He asked with a smile: "Does that make so much difference?"

"Yes, it does. I like to belong to myself. It seems more generous like that. Of course lots of women, I know, like their bondage. It makes them feel snug and secure. Then they like to think that their men are eternally faithful and all the rest. But that's rot. Men aren't like that, God made them different. And"—here she laughed with frank roguishness—"I'm willing to take man as God made them." Then with one of her quick changes of thought. "I suppose you know that you are an eligible catch, and that I might try and marry you? Probably every one thinks that I'm trying to. Well, perhaps I shall when I get old. I like you, like you too well to want to marry you yet."

"What is it you like?" John, like every other man, found it pleasant to be flattered by a pretty woman.

"What I first liked was the way you seemed to sum me up without any impudence when you looked at me. Now—oh, I like you all now. You've got such a nice clean body . . . Are you pleased that I like you?"

"Yes, of course." Then, after a pause, he asked. "Have you known other men as you have me?"

"That's not the sort of question a man should ask, John, but somehow I don't mind your asking. Yes, I have. There was another fellow, but he was a rotter."

"How?"

"Oh, he was soft; full of sickly sentiment. Just because I'd been generous to him, he seemed to think that he had power over me, and that I must marry him. I didn't in the least want to marry him. I couldn't shake him out of all his stupid prejudices. That's the best of you, John, you haven't got any. His mind seemed to be dark inside. Besides, he was soft. I turned him down."

"Hilda, you are splendid. I like you for your independence."

"Yes, there are not many girls like me," she answered, laughing, "though you may think there are, you wild bushman!"

When John was by himself after their rides and talks together, he was interested to notice how much he had entered into the field of her ideas, and how little of that firm substance of his own opinions, formed from hard experience, had been disclosed. They had plenty of things in common, and always interesting subjects to talk about; but there remained a world of deeper thoughts that Hilda's cheerful vivacity did not touch. All his experience of loneliness and pain was unknown to her. Perhaps it was an additional charm that her courage was without suspicion.

One of the trifles of their everyday life which amused John and gave him great pleasure was to see Hilda eat her breakfast. She did so thoroughly enjoy her food. There was nothing in the least greedy about her, but there was a frank, undisguised enjoyment, the wholesome

appetite of a strong and healthy woman. This was a small thing, but it pleased him. He gloried in her healthiness. She was happy, full of song and vigour, alive in the true sense. Everything that she did, she thoroughly enjoyed. John thought her a splendid girl.

As the ten days before the ore arrived flew past, John's intimacy with Hilda grew. At the end of the time he told her with brusque frankness that he must give his undivided attention to the work. She nodded in her self-contained manner, telling him to look sharp and grow rich.

Night and day he had to be at the mills, sampling the gold as it passed through, seeing that he was not robbed at any of the many stages. It was not hard work, but he had always to be on the spot. During this time he hardly saw Hilda at all, and consequently had opportunity of getting his relation with her "placed" (to a certain extent) in his mind. He found he did not miss her, nor suffer any ache from the separation. She remained like a warm piece of sunlight in his thoughts; a pleasant person to think about. He was glad that she was there, and that he would meet her again. That side of his nature which was uppermost when he was with her was excellent in its way, but not the whole of life. Yet though he could do without her, he was very glad of their relation. It made life richer. He felt, too, real friendship for her honesty and frankness. Had she been a man possessed of those qualities he would have still liked their possessor. As it was, he liked her additionally for being a woman. By her surrender she had paid tribute to, and strengthened his manhood.

During this period of work he often thought of Gilbert,

wondering in what way he had so failed that he had found sex to be the curse of life. John wondered if he had tried to find in it things that were in his own mind, and which rarely could find place in the compromise that must be between men and women. This thought brought the admission that it would be difficult to live always with a woman, then led him with a sharp pang to his recollection of Mrs. Cray. Perhaps with a woman like that anything might be accomplished. He remembered that he had loved her with such tender adoration that he had never desired her as he desired Hilda. Hilda always belonged to herself just as he belonged to himself. They were friends in the mutual expression of their rejoicing vitality. The recollection of his love was somehow different from that. He felt that such passionate tenderness as he had then experienced might plunge him so deep into pain and joy that he might lose all consciousness of himself, letting his identity be moulded into strange and unknown patterns. Gilbert, he felt, had never let that happen to him. Perhaps he had fallen between the two states. It would be possible, he imagined, to get them hopelessly muddled.

Again his thoughts came back to himself. Where he was travelling, or where he now stood he could not tell. He had no fear, and it was useless to regret opportunities that by inexperience he had lost. What he had attained was a certain measure of success. Life was again attractive, an open book with leaves pleasant to turn over.

When the work at the mills was finished, he picked up his relations with Hilda just where he had left it. It did not seem that he had been away any time; there was between them the same frank intimacy of thought, the

same sincerity. In addition to her friendship, he had now the glow of growing success. The mine was turning out better than expected.

The work of seeing consignments of ore kept John at Mt. Gerard. Often there were long intervals when he could enter into the gay life of the township. Sometimes, too, he would run up to the mine for a couple of days. He would return glad to see Hilda again, and to feel the warm, assuring embrace of her arms. Once, to find expression for his good luck and satisfaction, he said: "I think, Hilda, you are the most perfect mistress that a man could hope for. You leave a fellow so free and are so free yourself."

"That is the finest compliment a man can pay a woman," she answered. "I'd rather be a mistress than a wife."

For some months their easy relationship lasted, but in spite of a mutual and passionate desire for freedom, bonds gradually grew between them. In John's mind there germinated a tiny grain of pity for Hilda, as for some lonely creature who did not know the danger and treachery of life. Any expression of this feeling, either by word or movement, he knew, would be resented; still, it constituted a bond. The need for constant secrecy was also a tie. At times John experienced rebellious anger against so arbitrary a necessity, feeling that something must be very wrong with a society that penalized a woman for satisfying the natural impulse of her life. At other times, when he heard the ordinary smoking-room talk, he was glad that they had been able to keep their intimacy so hidden under the shell of cheerful indifference. Their chief safety was in Hilda's large ac-

quaintanceship with other men and John's easy friendships with women.

As the inevitable ties of their relationship grew, John began to feel that his life was becoming circumscribed. There was the mine and Hilda. There was Hilda and the mine. He began to want something else. A desire was stirring, making him restless. As yet he knew not what the desire was, but in his restlessness he felt that Hilda could not help.

When, one day, Stephens unexpectedly turned up at Mt. Gerard and suggested that John should take a month's holiday with him in Leith, John jumped at the idea. He had often vaguely thought of going to Leith, and now the chance had come at an opportune moment.

When he told Hilda that he was going, she looked just a little vexed that she could not come, too. But that was not possible.

"Well, good luck," she said, in her hard, matter-of-fact way. "Don't forget all about me."

He kissed her his assurances. He was not sorry to say good-bye, though, as on other occasions, he could think with pleasure of meeting her again when he returned. "I shall write," he said, "it will be good practice for me in letter-writing."

IV

By the side of Macquary's Hotel, at which Stephens had taken rooms the "St. Quintin" would have looked but a provincial inn. Its magnificence produced in John a sense of easy extravagance. He liked the super-luxury of its huge cushioned chairs and its attentive men-servants. The activity of the city life passing before the

windows was stimulating; there was satisfaction in being himself aloof, confident in the power of commercial success.

The afternoon of their arrival was hot even for Leith in midsummer. John and Stephen sat in the draught of air from an electric fan in their private sitting-room and looked out across the road and gardens beyond, to the wide blue water of the harbour.

"You haven't forgotten that I've booked us to dine out to-night?" said Stephens. "Some interesting people, the Melvilles; quite the leaders of culture and all that sort of thing, travelled a lot in Europe at one time. He's a keen yachtsman. I daresay we shall meet him a good deal on the water. It's his wife who chiefly patronizes the arts. You are likely to find it quite amusing. They are sure to have some of their latest protégés, some girl who paints pictures in spots or streaks, or some young fellow with a tie and a lot of hair, who scrapes a violin. Not so bad in small doses. It rather amuses me. After all one can always get Tom Melville to talk about his latest device for making fast the jib-sheets. You've done some sailing, haven't you, before you came on the fields? Oh, well! you needn't be hard up for a subject."

"Will there be much of a crowd?" asked John.

"Oh no, some six or seven to dinner, and I daresay half a dozen more will come in afterwards. It's quite an informal affair. There's sure to be some one interesting. Perhaps Carter will be there with his pretty wife — anyway, there will be nobody dull in the ordinary way. Mrs. Melville sees to that. She has a reputation to keep up. It's up to her to find some new kind of exotic every time. Mind they don't try and run you as one of their

side-shows. They are out for anything not quite usual. I can imagine the description. Entirely self-made — had such wonderful luck on the gold-fields; such a nice young man and so intelligent."

"Oh, damn," said John. "I shall keep my mouth shut."

"Don't do that, you'll miss half the fun if you do. What's it matter? It's not such bad sort of damned nonsense, anyway. . . . Oh, I didn't tell you, I've a little friend of mine coming round to tea — a nice little girl — I must introduce you. She's my typist, not that she's any good at typewriting, but that accounts for her. . . . She's my private secretary."

"Is she coming, too?"

"Good Lord, no! Mrs. Melville is fairly broad-minded, but she couldn't stick that."

"Why not?"

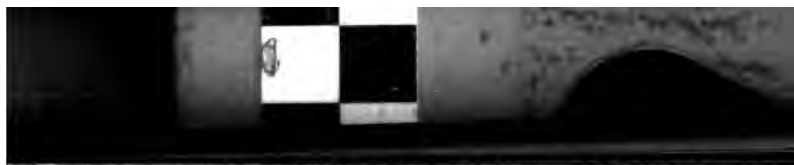
"Oh, well, one doesn't take a girl of that sort out to dine at a lady's house! Look here," laughed Stephens, "you mustn't let on you are so ignorant of the ways of the world, or they are sure to make a side-show of you."

"But why the dickens should a girl always be penalized if she doesn't get married? It seems unfair."

"Oh, you are up against Church and State there. You'd better leave it alone . . . but you'll soon get into the hang of things. They'll all talk, if not about their own affairs about other people's. All you've got to do is to listen. They are quite a pleasant set, when you get to know them."

John found the party amusing enough. To meet, for the first time, so many new types was bound to be an

interesting experience. Melville was a large bluff fellow with a fair beard. He smiled benignly at his guests, but didn't say much, leaving the way open for his wife. Mrs. Melville was a sinuous lady with a long neck and a refined face. She greeted most of her guests as, "Well, my dear," and informed them how pleased she was to see them. For John also she had a graceful greeting, having heard stories of him, she said, from her old friend, Jim Stephens. The guests were such as she had good reason to be proud of, each carrying with him the consciousness of some kind of success or distinction. There was Carter, a heavy fellow with a square chin who had made a fortune gambling in wool. Mrs. Carter, an exceptionally pretty blonde, with artistic leanings, developed, partly for the sake of the elegance of the occupation, partly as an escape from the rather thick atmosphere that Carter shed around him. There was Professor and Mrs. Whitestone. Mrs. Whitestone was a leading figure in Leith, being one of the chief intellectual lights. She had "squashes" every Wednesday where she presided, the central figure of art and learning. Her manner displayed the consciousness of her magnificence. She bore a resemblance to a plumed and distinguished ostrich. The professor was an insignificant little man, with wide-world reputation for his adventures in the realm of pure logic. He wore a dark blue suit which looked rather small for him, and had a large bald head, which, Stephens afterwards remarked, might have been laid by the ostrich. Mrs. Whitestone, he maintained, gave an occasional glance towards its shining dome, with just that air of proud possession which a mother-bird might bestow on an exceptionally fine egg. Then there was Hunter, the journal-



THE BEATEN TRACK 279

ist, a wiry man with black eyes and a sour smile, and Miss Raeburn, the new successful artist who was painting the portraits of all who could afford to pay. Stephens had been quite right. Her very original method to get her effect was to draw with crayons a series of straight lines, slanting from the right-hand top corner to the left-hand bottom corner of her canvas: a very remarkable conceit. Then there was her friend, Miss Mackintosh, a plump girl with a pleasant smile, who was so clever at painting china.

At dinner John sat between Miss Mackintosh and Mrs. Carter, and was very much interested in the talk about their studios and the pleasant-sounding easiness of their lives. Miss Mackintosh told him that she was going to have a show of her work in a few days' time. John promised to be present.

The evening passed pleasantly, in the open garden which looked out over the harbour. After dinner several of the guests came in, including two specimens of the hair-and-tie variety of young man. They had pleasant faces and an open, deliberate way of speaking, of which they were very conscious. Art and literature were still the subjects of conversation, but later in the evening these gave way to yachting. Mr. Melville now became animated, and he and Stephens arranged for expeditions in the harbour for several days ahead.

When, at the end of the evening, John and Stephens returned to their hotel, John felt a pleasant interest in his new acquaintances. He looked forward to meeting them again, feeling inquisitive to know how they spent their leisure. He had learnt that they could talk well, was indeed rather bewildered by the flow of conversa-

tion. It had all been very stimulating, but he supposed that they had other and wider activities.

V

The next day was spent sailing in the harbour. Stephens and Melville were both possessors of small yachts, and the party divided itself between the two boats. On the smaller yacht were Stephens, John, Mrs. Carter and a Mrs. Ogalini, who appeared to be an old friend of Stephens'. She was a small, bright-looking woman with an abundance of dark hair and rather soft, graceful movements. The day was fine, with a light breeze, and the boats moved leisurely over the water, exploring the many irregular bays and inlets of the harbour. It was arranged that at luncheon both parties should meet at a rendezvous; till then the boats followed their separate courses. As is usual on such occasions the conversation was between couples, only becoming general now and then. John soon found himself talking with amused interest to Mrs. Carter, who, he had to admit, came up to her reputation of frail, delicate prettiness. She was very young, only just twenty, and talked in an ingenuous manner, which John found very charming. He noticed in her a languid, seemingly tired expression, as if she had not much real interest in life. When she was not speaking she let her eyes roam over the sun-capped waves as though she did not see them.

John asked why her husband was not able to come with her.

She smiled, as though pleased at the question. "Oh! he has so much to do almost every day. He has to travel

THE BEATEN TRACK 281

about a great deal. He has gone to Albert and will be away a week, perhaps longer."

"I expect he wishes he could be here with you," said John.

"Yes." She was again languid and had lost interest. After a moment she asked him: "I suppose you've done a great deal of sailing?"

"Yes, up in the North-West by Garlip and further north."

"Oh, tell me about it. That must all be a very wild part."

He gave a short description of the cruise from Kaimera northwards. Mrs. Carter listened with wide eyes full of interest and sympathy.

"I should like to travel like that. You men are lucky in your freedom. It doesn't seem to matter with a man, how poor he is; he is always able to live his life."

John was puzzled at her allusion to poverty. "But what do you know of poverty?" he asked.

"Oh, a great deal." She smiled again, pleased at the question. "Before I married I was very poor. My father was an engineer at Kalgoorlie, not a rich one. We had very little money."

"You must find it now a pleasant change," said John. "It certainly is pleasant to have all the money one wants."

"Yes," she answered, without conviction.

John looked at her pretty, though rather sad little face, and saw what he might have seen at first sight, had he been more observant of other people's feelings; that she was unhappy in her marriage. "Poor little woman," he thought. "He does look a heavy, coarse

brute of a fellow with no ideas in his head beyond making money. Poor little woman."

The knowledge that Mrs. Carter was not happy, also that she looked pretty and helpless gave her additional interest. He thought it a shame that women should be tied to men that they didn't like, because in early youth they had been indiscreet enough to get married. He began to feel a certain tenderness for her as for some child who has hurt herself and who doesn't yet understand the cruel order of things that allows pain so unkindly to touch her. It pleased him too that she was cheered and happy in his company. While he talked to her about his adventures on the pearling coast and the gold-fields, her look of childish happiness returned. But even in her happy moods he could see that she was very sensitive, still smarting from the effect of some sharp pain.

During the next few days John met Mrs. Carter on several occasions, sometimes when out on the harbour, sometimes at dinner or at the theatre, and once he and Stephens went to tea at her studio to look at her paintings. At these times she made no attempt to hide her pleasure at his presence. John certainly liked her, though he felt no strong attraction towards her as he had towards Hilda. His emotion was chiefly one of compassion and kindness, mingled with a certain satisfaction at the tribute which her weakness paid to his strength. It was a pity her husband was such a heavy, uncongenial fellow.

VI

About ten days after the dinner-party at Mrs. Melville's, John received a note from Miss Mackintosh reminding him of the small exhibition of painted china and

allied artistic productions that she and some of her friends were giving. At the studio John found an assortment of amusing modern paintings, about which their creators were talking in a very serious fashion. Such fragmentary remarks as, "Extraordinary well proportioned" . . . "She's quite right and taking her art very seriously," and "Remarkable work!" caught his ear. Miss Mackintosh's painting was certainly what pleased him most. She covered large china bowls with a pale green background on which a continuous string of naked girls danced with every sign of jolly abandonment. The figures which, in their delicate pink, contrasted vividly with the pale green, had much originality of gesture and pose. They certainly lived. Two of the larger of these vases rather took John's fancy. Giving way to a sudden impulse he bought them.

When they arrived at the hotel he was rather embarrassed by their size. One he had packed and sent to Hilda with a little chaffing letter telling her not to forget him. The other he didn't in the least know what to do with. For a day or two it stood full of roses on a table in the sitting-room; then John suddenly remembered that Mrs. Carter had much admired the gay figures, and had regretted that her husband could not buy her one of the rather fantastically highly priced bowls. Again upon an impulse, he had the bowl packed up and addressed to her. He thought of writing a note, but merely enclosed his card.

The next day he received a very grateful little letter. It was so very kind of him, she said, to give her the beautiful bowl that she had so much wanted. Would he come to tea with her at her studio that afternoon. She

had asked Miss Mackintosh that they might both admire the bowl in its new setting.

When John reached the studio he found Mrs. Carter alone. She was becomingly dressed in pale green with a soft yellow scarf and waistband, matching her hair. Both she and her daintily furnished room looked very pretty. Miss Mackintosh had not yet arrived, so Mrs. Carter began to show John some of her own paintings. They talked about the bowl and how well it looked, also about the studio; then, since Miss Mackintosh did not come, they decided to have tea and not wait for her. After tea Mrs. Carter suggested that they should look at some sketches that she had made while travelling with her husband in the south. She pulled out a big album. Then they sat side by side, resting it upon a table. John turned over the pages while Mrs. Carter explained the drawings. John was not much interested in the pictures, but he experienced a feeling of considerable pleasure in her close proximity. He guessed that Mrs. Carter must also find the pictures rather dull, but he recognized it as part of the process that they had to go through. Although she talked volubly, neither of them paid much attention to what she said. There grew between them a more direct means of communication. John was conscious of her rather tender melancholy. It was very pleasing. Also, he felt tolerably certain that she had wished to be alone with him, and had never asked Miss Mackintosh to be present. He felt that she was delightfully slight, delicate, pleasant to embrace in her soft, filmy dress; yet he sat still, making no sign.

When they came to the end of the album, they both felt a little shy in the sudden absence of any subject-

matter, about which to talk. John held the last leaf in his hand. For a moment they were silent; then Mrs. Carter let her hand fall gently upon the back of his and rest there, as though quite unconsciously it had chanced upon that spot by accident.

A thrill at the delicate contact passed up his arm to his heart. He knew that she had the same emotion. Her face was turned away with a pensive, downward look, but he could guess the tumult of excitement that her calm concealed. He moved his hand so that her smaller one slid into his palm, then closed his fingers on it. His other hand he stretched to place on her shoulder. Then turned her round and kissed her.

"Oh, John, do you love me?" she said, her blue eyes very wide open, and shining with tears of emotion. He did not answer, but kissed her again.

"Oh, John, I have had so little happiness. . . . I am happy now . . . I knew when first I saw you."

For answer he still kissed her. What could he say? He didn't love her, and saw no reason why she should love him. They were both young and good-looking; that was the reason of their attraction. While she lay happy in his embrace, he told her how beautiful she was. Her young beauty with its delicate charm was her gift in return for his kisses and his praise. If she had been unhappy, he was sorry for her. If she was happy and because of him, he was glad. Why should she not take what happiness came in her way? So soft and delicate a creature, he thought, was perhaps not fitted for the hardnenses of life. He guessed that she would never willingly meet them, but would always find some kind of subterfuge. For his part, it was sufficient justification

that she was very feminine, and that her kisses were sweet. As for her husband — he was a dull fool immersed in stocks and shares — unworthy of a pretty woman. John had for her a genuine compassion when he remembered his view of Carter's thick lips and bristly moustache closed over a cigar. "Poor little woman," but she was pleasant to kiss and seemed equally pleased to kiss him.

Very different from Hilda, he thought to himself, lacking Hilda's vitality and hard cheerfulness. With Alice, he would never be able to feel so much at ease. They could never be so honestly comrades. He knew, thus early in the relationship, that between them there would always be a veil, not exactly of dishonesty, but of something that wasn't quite sincere, and which he would never be able to draw aside. He could divine her sentimentality as her chief quality, and a very real part of her charm. It was all in the way of experience and very sweet. To be critical at the moment of their first embrace seemed ungrateful. He would let their relation take its course unimpeded by thoughts. It would, of itself, develop easily enough.

VII

For the next few weeks, John found his time very largely taken up by Alice Carter. She was so frail and easily hurt that his natural gentleness made him very tender with her. Besides the demands that she made upon him, there were also those made by the necessity of secrecy. At first the latter had been stimulating. They had planned a wild adventure up-country; had taken train to Darmunding and had stayed at a small hotel among the hills. They posed as a honey-

moon pair. For a few days John had been very happy while they wandered together amongst the trees and the wild flowers. But although he was happy it was not an unclouded happiness. They had both had to tell, and to write, a great many lies, from which, somehow, the very texture of their relationship seemed to have suffered.

It was at Darmunding that he remembered Gilbert's remarks about marriage. He wondered, as yet very remotely, whether it was true that sex was the curse of life. He remembered that Gilbert had said how marriage changed him against his will. Well, not only was he now being changed, but all the surroundings of trees and plants appeared different. How they were changed he could not exactly say, but they had a different aspect. It was as if he was shut off from them. The personality of Alice Carter somehow stopped his natural communion with the wild things of nature. He could still admire flowers, taking pleasure in their colour and shape, but they were not the same as at one time they had seemed. Some essence, which to his earlier youth, had burned very vividly, and especially vividly under the influence of Mrs. Cray, was now but feebly alight. Since he felt that he could rekindle it by going away into solitude, he was not much concerned about its temporary absence. In place of flowers Alice offered him her flower-like and delicate self. For the time this was sufficient.

Gilbert's second wife, he imagined, must have been a woman rather like Alice. "Naked and shameless like a flower," he remembered had been the description. Yes, Alice was like that. To possess her as something peculiarly his own was sometimes an intoxicating and blazing thought; but in the shadow that it cast he could feel

the desire for escape and for freedom in himself. He could understand why Gilbert had run away.

When they were obliged to leave Darmunding and return to Leith, he was both glad and sorry. There was fierce, bitter pain in the thought of rendering her back to her husband, but there was also a light-heartedness at his own escape, a happiness which would take large mouthfuls of free air. Yet he was not free. They often met, and always there were notes passing between them. There were moods in which he felt the soft power of her surrender, when he felt he must rush to her and carry her off openly. He wanted, with the strength and brutality of his own hands, to mark her yielding nature with its own mark. In such moods she was to be his, to be enjoyed or discarded; he would kill any other man who looked at her with eyes of possession. Then the mood would pass. At their next meeting they would be gentle towards one another, and he would do anything that she wished.

Once she asked him to go to church with her. He had often seen churches, but had never been inside one. They knelt side by side. John was surprised at her obvious emotion. He wondered what she could find in the nasal whine of the hymns or in the pretentious and dull sermon. The whole thing, John thought, was dead: the dulllest show he'd seen, and he'd seen a good many dull music-halls since he'd been in Leith. It was dead dust, without even the juices of decomposition. A corroboree was a ceremony infinitely surpassing it in religious emotion and significance. After the service, when John was very bored, feeling that she had made a fool of him by making him sit through it all, Alice showed

THE BEATEN TRACK 289

signs of unusual sentimentality, oscillating between tearful manifestations of her affection, and oddly incongruous self-reproaches for being unfaithful to her husband. John decided that, if going to church were responsible for this difficult combination, he would not again accompany her.

When they were back at her house she turned to him with moist eyes. "John, you must love me very much to make up for my being so wicked." He didn't understand this talk about wickedness, it seemed to him beside the point; but he could dimly recognize that there was reason for her being not happy. He himself was not altogether happy. He felt that their relation led them nowhere. It was sterile, a flower without roots, it certainly had been sweet, but was destined to fade. He felt even as he looked into her large, blue eyes that life would sweep them apart regardless of all sentiments. She was not woman enough, she was soft not brave, she had no spaciousness about her. He felt that she could never live for long periods out of doors. Perhaps churches were made for that type of woman. Her life would always remain shut in, and cramped within the limitations of the town. Of course she had had bad luck in her marriage, but if she had married some ordinary "townee" successful fellow — that didn't happen to be such a heavy bore as Carter — she would have been happy. With him, she would never be happy. It was nonsense her falling in love with him, part of her weakness. They were not mated, though he did sometimes feel that fierce lust of possession. That again was weakness and shame. They were bound only by their weaknesses. She would be his slave, his plaything, to be loved and hated, never

his friend. Her thoughts were confined, he felt, within a small flat circle, crushed beneath the weight of common opinion.

When he was away from her, he dreaded and longed for their next meeting. He knew that he would have to step down to let their thoughts touch. It was pleasant stepping down, but the process often repeated became humiliation.

Sometimes he would get a picture of himself: one of the money-grubbing city throng, a successful member of society. Like all the rest he was greedy for women and money. There was Stephens making love to Mrs. Ogalini and running his little typist at the same time. He could think of a score of similar cases. Then there were the Melvilles with their veneer of cultured intelligence. Mrs. Melville, he suspected, had become so coated with her sense of the correct things to say and the correct things to do so as not to appear commonplace, that she had died inside her case; but the men were all like himself, greedy after money and women. Yet he could remember that once he had known other ways of life. Recollections of early idealism which had flourished so strongly under the influence of Mrs. Cray, sometimes reproached him with stabs of pain. That was life indeed. There, there was growth and hope, pain and joy mingled. Then he had felt a power of love that would increase always, carrying his hopes higher and higher. . . . It had failed him—crumbled to dust. He wondered. Life was now as strong as ever it had been. The way no doubt was still there. Why was he stumbling so aimlessly on broken paths?

Then again the life of the town would seize him as it

hurried by: the round of parties and entertainments, gossip at the club and assignations with Mrs. Carter. His weakness seemed to bind him to her. Her soft hands and wide eyes daily became more unquestionably a part of his life.

Again he would break away, questioning fiercely what right had she to live or hope for happiness. She was soft and weak, unworthy. He saw the lives of other women: the hard, grinding lives of town-bred women sacrificed to the mechanical routine of commerce. They had their professions and their vaunted freedom. On the empty letter of that freedom (what some talked bombastically of as emancipation) they could starve body, soul and sex; and die, broken and wasted, the refuse of a great machine. Hundreds of them had better right to live than Alice Carter.

He thought of Hilda. She was brave and wonderfully capable of taking the consequences of her acts. She would never snivel at fate. She was hard, well-tempered to life, and cheerful. Then he thought of Gilbert. Gilbert had known all these things about the city and society and the sheltered lives of women, and the lives of women that were not sheltered. All these things which John was just beginning to see he had seen long ago. Yes, and Gilbert had run away. In the bush he had found happiness!

John thought of the wide innocence of the bush, its virginal smile, its hardness, its cruelty, its delicate welcome of soft scents. In the light of that thought he began to hate the city. He saw his own restlessness during the last few weeks. He had been in chains, and every day was fixing them more firmly upon him. Well,

the way of escape was open. He had promised to be back at the mine long ago, and yet he had stayed in the town. Now he would go. The city with its vast pretentiousness could take care of itself. Why should he add to the dross of its existence?

VIII

As the train, which carried John from Ruperttown to Garloo, climbed the long incline leading out from the town into the open bush country, John felt the warm certainty and joy of one who returns home. At Garloo he discarded his town clothes in place of a blue shirt and dungaree. The strong desire to be immediately in contact with the earth made him break his journey, and for several days he wandered by himself in the bush, sleeping at night on the bare, red ground under the stars. Here at last his mind could escape the cramping bonds forged for it in the city. The ever-youthful quality of the desert was more lasting than any of the makeshift irrelevances of town life. In the evening hush of the bush there was calm: a tranquillity so wonderful, that the deep gratitude of his heart welled up in tears to his eyes. Here was the eternal source of his youth. The evening birds, each night, gave their mournful cries in the still air. They spoke the language most adequate to express the wonder of the twilight. Each night as he lay on the ground, looking up at the bright southern stars, he could see the shapes of black mulga-leaves silhouetted clear and dark against the depths of the sky. His heart was filled with gratefulness for the purity of his solitude. He could believe that every little plant and bush expressed, even in the shape of branch and twig, its sense of happiness

for remaining yet unviolated by the restlessness of mankind.

Yet though the solitude and close contact with the unspoiled wilderness was medicine to his soul, he knew that for him it was not the bread of life. Even in the happiness of his newly-found content, there was a deep-moving desire, which told him that his satisfaction was but temporary. This wild beauty of nature would not always be sufficient. It was not complete. His very reverence for life demanded more. There was something wanting before he could touch, with that yearned-for familiarity, the deep mystery of life. He knew that the key for him was in some attribute of the feminine. It was not merely in women. Femaleness was not enough; he was thankful that Mrs. Carter was safely in Leith. He wanted love as he had once felt its warm pulse—love, folded in hope. Hope of what? he questioned: of a spiritual freedom perhaps, in which all manifestations of life might be touched to an intenser joy.

He knew that it was not for him to live away from mankind. Unlike Gilbert, he had not sufficiently outlived desire. Desire, with its wings of hope, was just stirring after long years. Ever since he had landed at Kaimera, it had been buried under the wrack of broken illusions, under the weight of his body's fierce reactions towards life at any cost. Now once more desire stirred in his heart. It had driven him from the city to the desert and would drive him yet further.

For not more than a week did John stay in the bush near Garloo. He then travelled on to Tharamecka and thence to the mine. He was glad to be back at the work. The shafts had grown during his absence. There was

much news to hear from Dixon. He was glad to be back in the midst of work once more.

"The old mine's going along first-rate," Dixon told him. "She hardly needs looking at. The stuff comes out regularly; there's a lot more ready to go through the mills. I was waiting for you to give the word, but I'll go down and see it through whenever you like."

"I think it's your turn for a holiday," said John. "Wouldn't you like to go down and see your people? I'll see the stuff through the mills."

"Well, yes, I should. I want to see Leith, too. I hardly stopped there at all on my way up; just one day while the steamer was at Port Leith and that was all."

"Oh well, I'll give you some introductions, and, of course, Stephens will see you through. I wonder if you'll like the life. It's a great change from the bush. I'm very glad to get back."

"Why, didn't you like it?"

"In a way, yes, part of it was all right. I don't suppose though that a man like myself who's lived in the wilds all his life can understand what they are driving at."

Dixon waited for further explanation.

"Oh well, you see, Stephens moves amongst just the rich people. They have things as they like, yet none seem satisfied. To tell the truth, I don't think I like towns or the people who live in them."

"But why on earth not? They are just the same as other people, aren't they?"

"I don't know. I suppose they are. I don't know what people are like," John said testily. "I know I was

damned glad to get out of Leith and wish I hadn't stayed so long."

"What made you feel like that?"

"I don't know," John repeated more thoughtfully. "Well, I've got an idea what's partly the matter: the women are all so damned unhappy. I don't mean to say that they go about with long faces (they are a sight more sprightly than is natural), but they are not happy. The married ones are hardly ever contented; and why should they be with their beastly little, proper homes cluttered up with things . . . and men who own them, without taking the trouble to understand. The unmarried ones are worse off. They are either miserable because they can't get married, or else slave at some damned job that they hate, to keep what they call their freedom. There's an awful lot of talk about women's rights and freedom, but the more they get of it, the worse off they are. It simply means freedom to slave their youth and beauty away in an office for some money-grubbing brute like myself, without even being kissed in return. Do you remember old Gilbert used to say that sex was the curse of life. For women I think it is; neither with it, nor without it can they be happy. . . . As far as happiness goes the average black gin, who's the common property of half a dozen smelly old black boys, is better off than the women drudges of the town. Why, in a town, you seldom hear a woman laugh with anything like the light-heartedness of these black gins."

"Anyway, Leith doesn't seem to have agreed with you," laughed Dixon. "Don't you think that you are taking rather a sour view of things? The women I know aren't

a bit like you describe. They are as reasonably happy as they can be. Two of my sisters that are married are awfully happy, I'm sure."

"Where do they live?"

"In Hasty Town."

"That's only a tiny place, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Oh well, I'm sorry I'm sour," smiled John. "That's how they appeared to me in Leith. I didn't want to find them like that. Perhaps you'll have better luck. Anyway, I'm happy to stay here if you want to go."

It was arranged that Dixon should take a long holiday, first to Leith, and then down to "Cattle-chosen"; John to keep his eye on the mine while a new manager, whom they had just engaged, was getting into touch with the work. Then, after a week or so, John was to go down to Mt. Gerard to see the ore through the Mills.

After Dixon had left, the time at "White Rock" passed uneventfully. John was very glad to find himself once more amongst the interest of the work. He loved the mine as a man loves a child of his own making and discovery, but the desire, that he had felt kindling when he was alone in the bush at Garloo, grew steadily more urgent. He began, before long, to look forward to meeting Hilda again. He remembered the easy comradeship, wondering how he could for so long have done without it. Her hard absence of sentimentality would be a pleasant contrast to his recollection of Alice Carter.

He wrote her a letter saying that he would soon be down with a consignment of ore, and would be staying at the "St. Quintin." Close on the heels of his letter he followed. Hilda was just the same. She had the same

pleased laugh of recognition, the same cheerful smile, and the same frank renewal of their relationship. During the first few days, all the best of their past seemed revived. He thought her a wonderful person in her freedom. Then one day she surprised him by saying that she thought soon of getting married.

"Why?" he asked her.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm getting near the age when one has to get married."

"Is it so inevitable as that?"

"Yes, what's a woman to do if she doesn't get married? I don't want to work. Don't think me horrid, but, my dear, I couldn't marry *you*. Somehow it would spoil things. Why we have always got on so well together is that we are free. I'm glad it began like that, and so it must end. If we were married, you would soon cease to pay me compliments. Besides, I must marry some man I can manage, a quiet, docile sort of fellow. Some one who'll give me the things I want. You'd never do, John. You say you are bored with Leith already. That's where I want to live."

"He'll be a lucky fellow, whoever he is. You are splendid the way you can see things. . . . But I wish we could go on as we are now . . ."

"No, it's all very well for you, but I get bored to death in this little place, with all its beastly red dust. Besides, there comes a time when one *must* get married; I'm getting near it. I feel it in my bones. I'm jolly glad we met, but it couldn't last for ever. Think of the old women who are childless and lonely. I don't feel I was made for that."

"No, of course you are not. I hope you'll have a big

family of clear-headed, charming people like yourself."

"Thank you, I shall take great care not to have a big family. Two will be quite enough. I hope boys. I'd rather have boys, because then one can share so much in their lives as one grows old. I shall know of some of the pretty women they love, and be glad. I shan't be jealous any more than I am of you. . . . Of course, I know that you wouldn't have stayed all that time in Leith without some adventure! Are you glad to be back with me?"

"Yes——" John generalized from a particular case. "Most women are so sentimental."

"And I'm not."

"Not a bit."

IX

For some time after his work at the mills was accomplished, John stayed on at Mt. Gerard. From time to time he would visit "White Rock," and then return to the pleasant life at "St. Quintin." For a time the vague desire that he had felt at Garloo was no longer uppermost, and he was wholly glad of Hilda's companionship. Then, as the weeks passed, he began to be again discontented. He came also to understand Hilda's discontent. She was quite right in wanting to get married; her present life could not really satisfy her. Since he had been with her, she had spoken less about marriage, but as soon as he had gone, he knew that she would take the step. For both of them there were further things to be discovered. They had met and travelled together for a distance. They would be friends for always, but they must part, perhaps to meet again, but with new friendship. His growing

desire, vague but incredibly sure, urged him to travel on. But where was he to go? The solitude of the bush satisfied him no longer. Neither did the mine nor the life at Mt. Gerard.

One day he suddenly announced his intention of going back to Leith, giving as an excuse that he wished to meet Dixon. Hilda, who had seen his restlessness, understood at once, and felt a vague melancholy at their parting. This she concealed under her usual hard cheerfulness.

The night before his departure he went to her with mixed feelings of joy and regret. In the morning, when he was dressed, he went to kiss her good-bye, where she lay still in bed in her white nightgown. He felt a sharp tightening at his heart and an overflowing of unspeakable gratitude. He stooped to kiss her, putting into his kiss more undisguised affection than perhaps he had ever before expressed. She gave a little hard laugh, as if warding off, and rather afraid of, his tenderness. "Good-bye," he said, and, when he had left the room, felt he had left behind him almost too much of his life to be bearable. He knew he was right to go, yet the parting was full of pain.

On his journey westward in the train he could not forget the hard little laugh when he had kissed her. It made him understand the duplicity of both his and her feelings, also it revealed more than anything else he had experienced the tragic compromise of a woman's life. He understood how much was hidden beneath the surface, and felt an overwhelming pity. It was a terrible audacity that any woman, however well equipped, should challenge the cruelty and extreme hazards of life. Life was hard enough for men, but for women, how much

worse! How lonely each soul was. How terribly in need of love. Why was it he had forgotten how to love? One would not love people sufficiently, he thought, to protect them from the hard disenchantments of life. The thought of other people's existences became more clear than ever before. Each lonely, with nothing but that astonishing human bravery to save them from despair. Hilda — He did not really have fears for her — She would marry, would manage very successfully her husband and her children, have her full share of human happiness; and yet his heart ached. He found now that he loved her, but in a way quite contrary to any preconceived idea. That was why he was so willingly going from her.

X

When he arrived in Leith John did not go to Macquary's hotel, but went to a small hotel close to the harbour. He was disappointed to find that Dixon was down south with his people. Failing Dixon he didn't particularly wish to see any one. He felt that he had no particular function in Leith. He was there because he was restless, and the big movement of the city attracted him. He had no desire to join the routine of entertainments and parties, preferring rather to keep his presence in the capital unknown. He wrote only to Dixon, saying that he would be glad to see him.

For some time he spent his days wandering about the city looking at the many and various manifestations of city life. This, of course, had great interest, but still he was lonely, and he soon began to feel the monotony of his idleness. Then one day he made a discovery not of

anything new, but of something old, which he had almost forgotten. In a book shop he saw the name of writers that he had heard of from Mrs. Cray. He had a sudden desire to renew all those memories. The life he had then led was more real than any of his subsequent experience. He went in. The bookseller happened to be also a book-lover, and soon was interested in John's obvious ignorance of literature coupled with his keen enthusiasm. For an hour John remained in the shop talking with the bookseller over different volumes commended to his notice. At the end of the time he came out with a large parcel under his arm. The bookseller had "set him up," as he said, for some time to come.

The next month was one of ever-increasing pleasure. It was as if John had stepped into a new country, or rather into several very large new countries. He read Darwin and Fabre. Fabre he particularly loved. He read Keats and Shelley. Shakespeare he discovered for the first time. Don Quixote was also among his collection. The riches of all the world were opened before him. However long he lived there would always be more and more to find out; always a richer life.

One day Dixon walked into the hotel. "What are you doing here?" he asked, as he looked round at the faded curtains.

"Lying low," said John. "I didn't want to mix in again with all that crowd."

"But what do you do with yourself?"

"I've been reading," said John, amused at Dixon's surprise.

"I see you have. What a lot of books." Then —
"this seems a dingy sort of place."

"Oh, it's not so bad; it's quiet. No one of the set ever comes here."

"I should think not. . . . But it *is* dingy. Look here, I want you to come down and stay with me at our place."

"But I can't ——" John began.

"Oh, yes you can, you can read as much as you like, do just what you like. It's quite as quiet as this and much nicer. I've got a nice little mare for you to ride, and when you are tired of reading, there are things we can do on the station. They have all heard so much about you, they want you to come, and say, I've got to bring you along with me."

This appeared to John to be the one thing that he had of course wanted. He did want the country again.

"All right, I'll come. I'd love to."

CHAPTER IX

EPILOGUE

I

THROUGH a luxuriant, though airy, undergrowth of ferns, black-boys, tree-ferns and Dicksonias, the huge mottled stems of jarra and salmon-gum thrust upward like towering columns, which carried, a hundred feet from the ground, the magnificent vaulting of their branches. In the early stillness of dawn, a thin mist hung in the tree-tops, while here and there more opaque streaks of vapour stretched motionless athwart the stems, like sleepy sharks drowsing in a forest of giant undersea growth. Few birds were yet singing; an occasional parrot high up among the leaf-tracery screamed, and perhaps was answered by some distant mate. Night-moving animals stirred the fronds of fern, and slid silently over the moss. Among the moss grew tiny plants; creepers and sundews, with flowers as small as their delicate leaves with thin petals yet concealed within the protecting green calyx-cup. A small white tent, looking as insignificant as a dropped handkerchief amongst the surrounding grandeur of vegetation, was the only sign that man had invaded the august reticence of the forest. In the doorway of the tent stood a young woman. She was looking out through the tree-stems, and her glance travelled upward to the faint tracery of leaves half-obscured

by the mist. Her look of quiet happiness seemed to be touched by the pervading spirit of the dawn, having a simple harmony with the great enveloping freshness of all things newly awakened. A week ago she had been married to John Sherwin. He had taken her, with all the simple happiness of her unshaken confidence, away into the forest, one of those great forests that she had known so well since her childhood, which now opened all its secrets to her heart, filling her with content.

Mary Sherwin was blue-eyed and fair skinned, with broad forehead and delicately moulded chin. She had the look of one who is still full of confidence in life and in herself, that confidence most able to express the firm happiness of human life. In the forest, there was for her no fear lurking, just as in life there was no fear. If there was enchantment, and assuredly there was, that enchantment was a part of the beauty of existence. For a few moments she stood with alert eyes and ears listening to the hushed though vigorous breath of the dawning day. Then stepping silently across the moss, she walked a short distance through the undergrowth to where a stream served her as her daily bathing-place. Here she bathed, delighting in the fresh coldness of the water. After she had bathed and was again dressed, she plucked a small bunch of flowers, and hung them on a twig, then she returned to the tent and began to prepare things for breakfast so that she might be ready with hot drink and food for her husband when he returned.

John had risen very early at the first twilight. He had left his young wife asleep, and had wandered off with his gun into the forest. In the early morning it was easier to shoot meat for their day's food, also, it left his time



EPILOGUE

305

free to ride, walk or read with her in the daytime. He had gone some distance from the camp before he turned homewards with a couple of young wallabies slung over his shoulder. On this morning walk, which was the first time that he had been deliberately alone since his marriage, he felt the full measure of the content that so suddenly had come into his life. It now seemed strange to remember that only three months ago he was a discontented man, spending his time in irrelevant philanderings in Leith. He remembered the days in the bush at Garloo, and the urgent desire he then had towards a more satisfying expression. Later, when he had come to the farm on the Margaret River, it had seemed to him a place isolated and complete in its own atmosphere, shut off from the influences of modern civilization. All the best associations of his own youth were here made more perfect by the sober dignity of the old farmer and his wife. Here, he recognized, was a life very simple, yet almost proud in the very limitations imposed by its simplicity. In that small, neat homestead, what was worthy of human praise and effort very definitely spoke for itself. The father and mother and children all expressed in their every movement the assurance of their tacit belief in bravery, strength and cleanliness. There was kindness, too, and the happiness engendered by a sympathy, imaginative enough to allow for individual development.

From the very first Mary had seemed to him like a grown-up and beautiful child, a child, whom he at once hoped would never know the cruelties and ugliness of life. He had felt for her, in those first days, a tender admiration such as he had once experienced for the brilliant blue butterflies, which with spontaneous happiness

open and close their wings in the bright sunlight of the desert. He felt that the existence of so beautiful a creature was in itself a justification of life, of life as yet untouched by the urgency of physical needs. What most appealed to him was her spiritual gladness. Her soul was pure, strong for adventure. First, admiration alone filled him, then he began to feel that a being so proud and tender must never be permitted to go unshielded among life's cruelties which can be so fierce in their pain that both flesh and spirit can, at the contact, be mortally wounded. Though he believed that the courage hidden deep in the calm composure of her eyes could vanquish many injuries, he did not wish that her spirit should be torn by contact with what was ugly. It was enough that men should have to undergo that ordeal; why should frail women, on whom the very functions of life imposed so many burdens, be compelled to bear it also. If her body must of necessity suffer from life, he wished her spirit to have always strong wings, that had never been broken.

His love for her had grown quickly, but with little passion. It was at first such a love as he would have felt for a child, who, without knowing it, needed his protection. During his stay at the farm there had been much opportunity for them to talk. They had ridden often in the evenings over the wide enclosures that sloped toward the sea. They had talked not only of the wild outdoor life that they both loved, but of the thoughts stirred in him by the books he had been reading. The ideas germinating in his own mind had also struck root in her brain, becoming thereby a bond. In her shining, eager enthusiasm he saw his unspoiled self. It seemed that



EPILOGUE

307

all that was most loved in himself, and which he had thought lost, was suddenly redeemed.

When he asked her to marry him, he knew already her answer. As they rode home that evening it was surprising that they had kept separate for so long, and that they should be married now seemed a small thing, it was but the beginning of an adventure. Perhaps by the help of that adventure he would rediscover himself. Already, values won from past experience were becoming firm and sure.

Now as he walked alone in the forest in the hush of early dawn, the memories of his past life gave him a feeling of awe and yet of hope in the sight of his new adventure. When he came to the stream, he followed its course to their bathing-place. Here he found the little bunch of flowers, and knew that his wife had already been there. Quickly taking off his clothes he plunged in. When he rose to the surface he shouted from sheer joy in life.

At the tent he found Mary waiting for him with breakfast ready.

II

One morning when they were riding through the forest towards the coast, which was not far distant, she exclaimed suddenly: "John, tell me about Leith. I have often wanted to go, but have never been further north than Pinjanup. I have heard so much about it. It must be wonderful there. Will you take me?"

"It isn't half so nice as the country here," said John.

"But there's the wonderful harbour. I should like to see that, too."

"Yes, the harbour's all right," he admitted.

"Don't you like Leith?"

"No, I don't."

"Why?"

John didn't wish to tell her all his reasons for disliking the city, yet felt that if he based his answer on any small foundation she would think lightly of it. During his two visits to Leith his eyes had been open; and in any city or town it is not difficult to see the misery of the streets; the poverty, greed, dishonesty, luxury, indifference. He hoped that his wife would never know of the great substratum of city life, believing that ignorance of such things meant a freer happiness. Such lives as Mrs. Leeth's, Mabel's and even Mrs. Carter's, he felt, were the natural product of the great mill of civilization, which, gathering all human desire and spirit into its clutch, mangles them beneath its huge rollers, and at last flings out the poor remnants of human souls, to hang slack and wasted like dirty rags. But he did not wish to tell her all this. "I hate the cities and towns because life loses its value there. Everything . . . things of the most importance get covered up by all the things that don't matter."

Mary was silent for a little, then she said: "I should like to go and see for myself. I have always thought of Leith so differently. Father and mother are proud of our city. You see, they remember its growth. It's the centre of the country. I thought it was the heart of all the life of the land."

"No. The real life is out here and up in the bush, that's where people do things. . . . I can't explain it, because I don't understand it all. But I know that I dislike that life and love this and the life up in the bush."

That's all," he smiled. Then since Mary was again silent, "I'm like my father," he said. "He ran away from civilization and hated it. Of course, in a way my father was a failure. That's why he lived always on that island. I don't want to do that, but"—he spoke now with sudden feeling—"I feel that only injury and evil can come to people from life in cities. I've seen such hell of misery there. No one is really happy. The rich people do an awful lot of things to keep themselves amused, but they are not happy."

Mary smiled at his sudden earnestness, she liked him for being so definite and uncompromising. "I want to know about things for myself," she said; "I'm not so weak as to break at the first touch."

"I know you are not," he said gravely, then, smiling, "There's always life."

"Will you take me to Leith?"

For some moments he made no answer. He didn't like to think of Mary among Mrs. Melville's set, caught up in all their irrelevancies. Then he thought, that if he had been able to come safe through it all, she with her calm dignity of spirit would be able to form a true valuation. He believed that the ballast of her early life would bring her safely through the city's superficial glamour. "Yes, I'll take you," he said. "And I'll take you to the mine, too, and show you the bush-scrub. I love the desert, in a way, as much as I love this country here. And then I'll take you on to see my people at Kanna Island. I should like to see them again, and it would give them great pleasure to see you. You will find them rough, crude people, who have been cut off from the rest of the world for nearly thirty years. My father was

always a rough fellow, though he made me respect him. We had a great struggle when I wanted to leave the island. It was that, that brought us together. I never loved him till then. Then he showed me that he could be generous as well as strong. . . . Will you come with me over there? "

"Yes, John. I'd like to."

"Very well; we'll go first to the mine and I'll show you the country that Bob and I tramped through. Then we'll go to Kanna, then back to Leith, and you can stay there as long as you like. By that time the new house will be built."

"If you don't like Leith we won't stay there long," she said. "We can come back here. I've never been so happy as I am here. I don't suppose I shall want to stay long in Leith, but I want to see for myself. If the new house is nearly finished, of course, I shall want to come down and see how it's getting on."

"Look," he said, "you can see the sea through that gap in the trees — and again over there right away in the distance. My word, this is a glorious country." Then, smiling at his wife, "I shall be sorry to leave it for even a few weeks, but it will be fine to come back to it. . . . Bob has been a trump the way he's looked after the mine while we've been down here, and I've neglected it shamefully. . . . Well, we'll start as soon as you like."

"Oh, not just yet," she said. "Let's stay a week longer."

"Very well, then, we'll go home and say good-bye to your people and get some clothes together. I want to see the builders, too. I shall go over to Hasty Town and make sure they understand all about the new house.

EPILOGUE

311

I shall have a good three days' work to put in before I'm ready to start."

For a while they talked about the new house that they were having built on an estate that they had bought not far from "Cattle-chosen," and about their coming journey. But later, when from a small hill-top a long stretch of coast and broken sand-dunes was suddenly spread before them, they forgot everything in the delight of that wide view of sparsely populated land sloping to the white breakers of the Indian Ocean. John was very glad that there was yet a week's respite before returning to the life of the world. He would willingly go when the time came, yet it was a pleasant thought that for some days longer they would sleep beneath the high vaulting of the trees, and each morning be awakened by the early cry of birds in the cool seclusion of the forest.

THE END





**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

JUN 1 1918		
JUN 1 2 1918		
JUN 1 3 1918		
JUN 1 4 1918		
JUN 1 5 1918		
JUN 1 6 1918		
JUN 1 7 1918		
JUN 1 8 1918		
JUN 1 9 1918		
JUN 1 10 1918		
JUN 1 11 1918		
JUN 1 12 1918		
JUN 1 13 1918		
JUN 1 14 1918		
JUN 1 15 1918		
JUN 1 16 1918		
JUN 1 17 1918		
JUN 1 18 1918		
JUN 1 19 1918		
JUN 1 20 1918		
JUN 1 21 1918		
JUN 1 22 1918		
JUN 1 23 1918		
JUN 1 24 1918		
JUN 1 25 1918		
JUN 1 26 1918		
JUN 1 27 1918		
JUN 1 28 1918		
JUN 1 29 1918		
JUN 1 30 1918		



